

Tests

SIDE-BY-SIDE FRIDGES

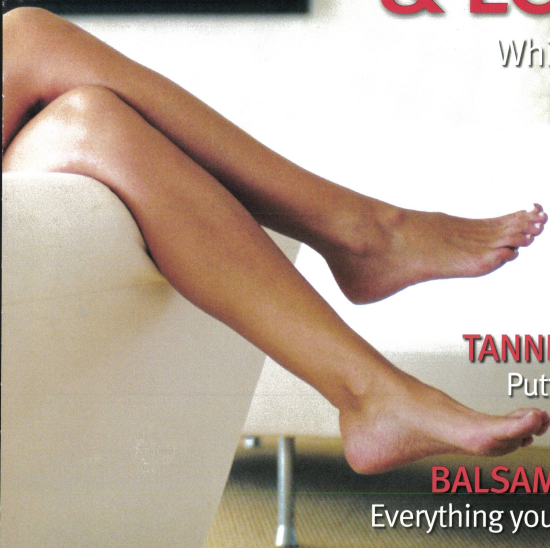
CDMA PHONES

KIDS' BIKE HELMETS

PETROL LAWNMOWERS

CHOICE

Independent information for smart consumers

A photograph showing a person's legs from the knees down, positioned inside a tanning bed. The legs are spread apart, and the feet are pointing towards the right. The tanning bed is white and has a dark rectangular panel on the wall behind the legs.

PLASMA & LCD TV

Which is better?

TANNING SALONS

Putting you at risk

BALSAMIC VINEGAR

Everything you want to know

COMING SOON ...

LCD TVs

An LCD screen doesn't automatically make a good TV.



Red wine

Finding a good-value merlot, shiraz and cabernet sauvignon.



Barbecues

They're astonishingly expensive these days, so what do you get for your money?



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Decisions, decisions

Starting in this issue with a comparison of LCD and plasma TVs (page 8), CHOICE is allocating more of its resources to testing electronic leisure products, particularly televisions. The falling prices and increasing popularity of LCD and plasma TVs have meant magazine and web subscribers have been asking for more reports on them, so this financial year we've worked on giving you what you want.

As you probably know, CHOICE buys the products it tests, like a normal consumer, so this is a significant investment — even with falling prices some of these TVs cost several thousand dollars. And it's not just an investment in the products themselves: we need to increase our testing staff and upgrade our lab to accommodate the new digital technology and the increase in product numbers and frequency of tests.

You're not going to lose out on other tests because of the increase in the electronics area, but as you know, CHOICE's resources aren't endless — we rely solely on subscriber support for our magazines, website and books to keep doing this work. But we've based our priorities on consumer demand.

There are other areas, such as research into and rating of the corporate social responsibility of the companies that make the appliances and other products we test, that would require a similar investment of money and staff time. We won't ignore this area, and when our counterparts in Europe publish relevant articles with this information, we'll reprint them. However, for the moment it's had to take a back seat in our list of priorities, though we'd still like to hear from subscribers interested in this area of potential consumer influence.

As for the TVs, you should be able to read about LCDs in the next issue of CHOICE and plasma sets early in 2006.



Jane Mackenzie,
Editor

FOR MEMBERS ONLY

www.CHOICEextra.com.au



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A burning issue

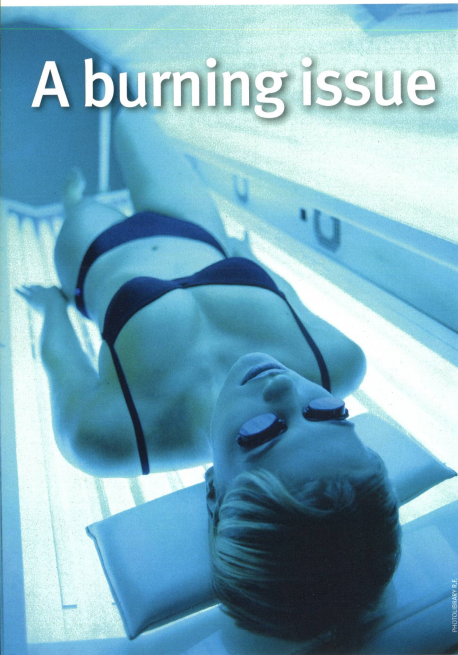


PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

Are solarium operators risking our safety for the sake of a sale?

IN A NUTSHELL

- Some solarium operators are misinforming customers about the safety and supposed benefits of tanning and solarium use.
- Standards for solarium operators are intended to make indoor tanning as safe as possible for customers, but they're only voluntary and some operators aren't complying with all the requirements.
- Young people and people with skin type 1 (see page 12) have increased health risks associated with UV exposure, but they aren't always identified by staff or discouraged from using solariums.

Despite years of public health campaigns warning about the dangers of sun exposure (the phrase "there's no such thing as a healthy tan" may sound familiar), half of all Australians still believe a tan is healthy.

When we're not sunning ourselves at the beach, it seems that a solarium is a popular alternative for catching some rays, particular among young women. Solarium numbers are on the increase — in Melbourne alone there's been a 600% increase in operators in the last 14 years. And a 2004 survey by The Cancer Council Australia found that over 290,000 Australians had used a solarium in the previous year.

The voluntary Australian/New Zealand standard 'Solaria for cosmetic purposes' (AS/NZS 2635:2002) acknowledges the continuing popularity of indoor tanning, and sets out requirements for operators to make it as safe as possible for customers. But are operators complying with the standard?

To find out, CHOICE researchers posed as potential customers and visited and phoned businesses offering indoor tanning services (see *What we did*, far right, for details). The results are disturbing.

FACTS VS MISCONCEPTIONS

There are some common misconceptions about the safety and benefits of indoor tanning that some operators seem to be perpetuating — whether through misinformation from staff or claims made in promotional material.

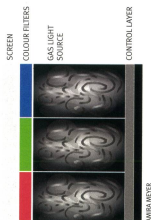
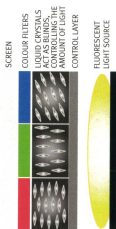
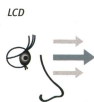
■ Indoor tanning is safer than sunlight

A question about the comparative safety of indoor vs sun tanning found 18% of our phone survey respondents telling interviewers that tanning indoors is safer. "It's a lot safer than outside... The UV in the solarium is not the harmful rays," said one respondent; and "Definitely safer. The sun is 15% UV, the solarium is 2% UV," said another.

Our interviewers also asked if using a solarium could age their skin, and were told 'no' by 16% of respondents. "My mother is in her 40s and uses them. She still looks good" and "Not as long as you use moisturiser" are just a couple of examples of the misinformation our interviewers were given.

In fact, there's no evidence that solariums are safer than the sun for tanning. Exposure to

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE IN TECHNOLOGY?



THE SCREENS

Brand / model (in alphabetical order within groups)

LCD

Brand / model	Screen size (inches)	Resolution (pixels)	Power when on (W)*	Standby power (W)*†	Price (\$)‡
SAMSUNG LW46G1SWXXEC (A)	46	1920 x 1080i	286.6	0.67	13,999 (A)
SHARP LC45G1XSYS	45	1920 x 1080i	261.3	1.40	11,999
PLASMA					
PIONEER PDP-435HD	43	1024 x 768	186.1	0.77	6999
SONY Plasma WEGA TV KEMX4251 (B)	42	1024 x 1024	182.8	1.40	8999 (B)

* Measured over two hours while playing *The Phantom of the Opera* DVD.

** With the TV switched off but plugged in and switched on at the power point.

† Recommended retail price in September 2005.

(A) Only available on special order from Samsung.

(B) Discontinued.

LCD TV TEST

In the December issue there'll be a report on our tests of about a dozen LCD TVs. Early in 2006 we'll be testing plasmas.

into adjacent colours. None of the trialists noticed any banding of colours.

Both the LCDs (SAMSUNG and SHARP) claim a horizontal viewing angle of 170° (indicating how far to the side of the screen you can sit and still see the picture clearly). However, some trialists noticed the SHARP's brightness and colour intensity noticeably diminished as they approached this angle, whereas the SAMSUNG's remained pretty much the same. Both the plasmas were also acceptable.

In addition to our trialists' observations we did a few basic technical tests. All the screens performed well, although the SONY chopped off the picture a little at the sides. Power usage in standby mode (the TV switched off but plugged in and switched on at the power point) was quite acceptable for all of them, but the plasma screens used less power when running than the LCDs (see the table above for details).

CHECK FOR QUALITY

Our trial suggests that image quality isn't tied to the screen type, but rather to the way an individual screen's system deals with the source material. Your best bet is to check plenty of TVs of both technologies, and buy based on the quality of the output of individual products. Insist on seeing them delivering the sort of source (analogue TV, standard-definition digital TV, high-definition digital TV, DVD) you're most likely to watch. Don't be swayed by simplistic arguments that this technology is better than that for overall image quality.

JARGON-BUSTING

■ **Analogue, digital and definition:** Most currently owned TV sets in Australia receive and process an analogue signal. Digital broadcasting is a more efficient use of the airwaves because it allows the use of compression techniques not possible with analogue. So potentially the broadcast spectrum can accommodate as many as four standard-definition digital (SDTV) channels where only one analogue channel could fit before.

The same broadcast 'space' could therefore be divided into four different digital TV streams, each providing a picture quality at least as good as the current analogue system, without snow and ghosting problems and with improved sound. Alternatively, that additional capacity could carry just one high-definition channel (HDTV) with near cinema-quality picture and sound.

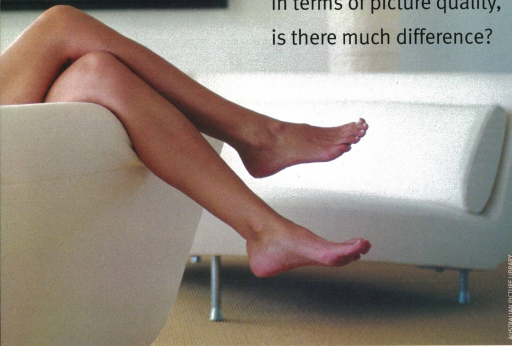
If you have an analogue TV set you need a set-top box (STB) to convert a broadcast digital signal into an analogue signal. You can receive a high-definition or standard-definition signal through your STB, but if your TV set is only capable of displaying SDTV, that's what you'll see. The LCD and plasma screens in this article can display both SD and HDTV.

Despite the Federal Government's original plan to stop broadcasting analogue signals in 2008, the current low consumer take-up of digital technology makes that very unlikely to happen.

■ **Resolution** is a measure of the amount of detail a screen can display, and is measured in dots called pixels. You'll often hear it talked about if you're thinking of buying a new TV because plasma and LCD screens can have more dots than traditional CRT TV screens. Unfortunately the resolution of the screen will rarely match the resolution of the source, so the screen must reinterpret the signal to make it fit. This may mean some sources look better than others on particular screens.

LCD vs plasma

In terms of picture quality,
is there much difference?



AUSTRALIAN PICTURE LIBRARY

IN A NUTSHELL

■ Judge a TV screen on its performance rather than its type — we found quality differences between models regardless of whether they were LCD or plasma.

■ On any one set, picture quality may differ with different inputs (analogue TV, DVD, etc).

Television is no longer simple. Gone are the days of one type of screen (cathode ray tube, CRT). Currently there are five screen types — CRT, plasma, LCD, rear projection and overhead projection — and it's likely that others will follow to add confusion to an already complicated marketplace.

At the moment LCD and plasma screens are the sexy new products and are being pushed relentlessly in shops. Is there any difference between these two technologies that would make one a better choice than the other, regardless of brand and price?

To find out we asked some manufacturers to lend us a high-definition TV sized around 42 inches (around 107 cm for those who, apparently unlike the TV industry, think metric). PIONEER and SONY each agreed to lend us a plasma TV, and SAMSUNG and SHARP came up with LCDs.

We asked 20 people to spend about 30 minutes watching some high-definition and standard-definition digital footage on them (see Jargon-

busting, below right), as well as part of a commercial DVD movie. We mainly wanted to find out whether they could see any significant difference in the pictures delivered by LCD and plasma. They viewed all four screens at the same time and we made no attempt to hide the brands, but we didn't tell the trialists which type was which or what they cost. We used the same lighting conditions we normally use for a traditional CRT TV test.

We asked each volunteer to look out for things that might make a screen difficult to watch. Bearing in mind comments that are often made about the two screen types, we asked them to pay particular attention to blurry movement or trails behind fast-moving objects; colours bleeding into each other or looking like bands rather than smooth gradations; sharp edges; and detail in both still and moving objects. They were also asked to pay attention to skin tones and decide if the colour balance looked natural and pleasing.

NO TRENDS

Overall the SAMSUNG (LCD) was the most popular, but each of the screens had at least one trialist listing it as their favourite. Trialists particularly liked the SAMSUNG for its very sharp picture and strong colours.

The trialists noticed differences in the way the screens dealt with colour and detail, but it didn't relate to any particular type. For example, the SHARP (LCD) and SONY (plasma) were thought to have a softer picture than the others, while the LCD SAMSUNG was the sharpest — almost too sharp for some people.

Large screens such as these are often used to showcase high-definition television — and it certainly looks impressive. But in reality your TV is likely to have to deal with broadcasts from lots of different sources. All the screens coped well with all our sources. Not surprisingly, the picture quality generally dropped slightly as the definition decreased, but some trialists commented that the SHARP (LCD) was a little less sharp with the high-definition source and crisper with the DVD.

It's sometimes claimed that LCD screens can't cope as well as plasma with fast-moving objects. A few trialists noticed slight trails behind fast-moving objects on some of the screens, but on both the plasmas and LCDs. The same can be said for strong colours bleeding

Clocking up power use

I have a comment to make on the article *Microwaves for a small household* (CHOICE, July 2005). The review included a model with a dial rather than touch controls (PANASONIC NN-MX21WF). Under the 'bad points' heading 'no clock' was included.

I bought a dial microwave and the main reason was that it has no clock. I didn't want yet another appliance with a clock and a trickling use of electricity. In my view, appliances with clocks and lights that are constantly on use unnecessary electricity, and I try to minimise such appliances in my home. The amount of electricity used by one of these appliances individually may be small, but taken collectively, it can really add up.

So for me, 'no clock' is a good point.

Angie Gutowski
Yarram, Victoria

A clock on a microwave can be useful if you don't have a clock or timer in your kitchen, as well as for precision cooking (if you want to cook pappadums for 25 seconds, say). However if, like Angie, you don't need another clock or timer, and you're mainly using the microwave to warm things up, not having a clock can save you wasting between 10 and 30 kWh of electricity per year.



Bottled water rip-off

For 21 years I was an engineer with a major metropolitan water company and can add to your comments that buying bottled water is a waste of money (CHOICE, July 2005). We always advised customers to simply put water from the tap into a wide, shallow bowl (to get a large water surface area) to allow the chlorine to evaporate off. It only takes about 30 minutes for this to happen. The water can then be bottled and kept in the fridge.

I often asked visitors to sample my 'bottled' water and received comments such as, "This is much better than tap water..."

Chlorine is the thing 99% of people complain about and it's easily fixed by evaporation. It's needed to kill the bugs, but if you drink your 'bottled' water within a few days of letting the chlorine evaporate, it's quite safe.

Ron Sutherland
Melbourne

Postage puzzle

Australia has a system of two types of postage stamps: one for domestic consumption and the other for posting letters and articles overseas. The stamps for international use have the words 'International POST' printed on a blue strip on the left edge of the stamps.

Have pity on those citizens who need to correspond regularly with friends and business both locally and overseas — they have to stock two sets of stamps with various denominations. I urge Australia Post to abandon this two-types-of-stamps system. Other countries with GST or VAT don't have it.

Gordon Low
Doncaster, Victoria

Sending post overseas is generally GST-free. Specially marked International Post stamps therefore don't include it, and this would be noted in Australia

THUMBS UP!



■ When Shirley Sinclair's out-of-warranty vacuum cleaner developed a problem with one of its seals, her expectations were exceeded when **DYSON** sent her a replacement part within 72 hours and at no cost.

■ Yvonne Danson has a **PANASONIC** LCD monitor that started to fade two years into a three-year warranty. Trouble was, she no longer had the purchase receipt. **PANASONIC** confirmed the production date from the serial number and repaired it under warranty — including couriering the monitor from and to Yvonne's home.

Post's sales accounting system. However, domestic stamps include the cost of GST. If you put \$1.10 in domestic stamps on a card that's going overseas, in effect you've only paid \$1 for the postage, because the government has taken 10 cents of it in GST. So Australia Post says you have to put on an extra 10% in domestic stamps (11 cents) to ensure that the \$1.10 postage cost is covered.

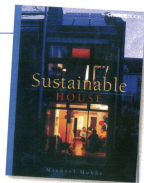
If you only send the occasional letter overseas and don't want to go to the post office just to buy one stamp, you might be tempted to use some of your domestic 50 cent stamps. A typical airmail letter to Europe, Africa or the Americas costs \$1.80, so you'd use four 50 cent stamps — and will have covered the necessary extra 18 cents for GST. If you're sending a card or postcard (cost \$1.10 to anywhere), or a letter to New Zealand or Asia (\$1.20), you'd have to use three 50 cent stamps — so again, you've well and truly covered the cost of GST.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

We want to hear from you — your experiences help our research and often let other readers know about scams and rip-offs. Positive outcomes you've had to a complaint you took to a manufacturer, retailer, importer or tradesperson interest us, too. Address these letters to *Thumbs Up* at the address on page 2.

To thank you for writing to us, *Your Letters* awards a prize of a CHOICE book to the 'Letter of the month'. This month's winner, Ron Sutherland from Melbourne, receives *Sustainable House*, or any other book of his choice from Consumer Bookshelf, pages 47–48.

We're sorry we don't have the resources to answer all your letters personally, and in the magazine we may edit them or print only an extract. See page 2 for how to reach us.



Can you help?

NANNIES

Many parents use nanny agencies to help them find the perfect carer for their children. If you've ever hired a nanny through an agency, we'd like to hear about your experiences — good, bad or just interesting.

For example, how long did it take to find a nanny that met all your requirements? Were you satisfied that the agency had made all necessary checks (qualifications, references, etc) of the nannies they put forward for the job? How much did hiring a nanny cost?

Contact us at Nanny agencies, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, or email nannies@choice.com.au by the end of November.

Free-range pork?

The welfare of farm animals can arouse strong passions among farmers and animal welfare enthusiasts alike. As consumers, it's always good to be offered a choice — even if it means paying extra for meat that's been produced by more humane methods.

About six million pigs are slaughtered in Australia each year, and most of them are intensively farmed — bred and kept severely confined in sheds for all or most of their lives.

Breeding sows are kept in individual metal pens (sow stalls) for all or part of their four-month pregnancy. They can stand or lie down, but they're on bare concrete and don't have enough room to turn around. Then when the sow gives birth she's moved to a farrowing crate that's even smaller.

The advantages of intensive methods for the farmer are higher productivity in terms of the yield of meat per kilogram of feed, and less work for the stockmen (both of which mean cheaper meat for the consumer).

Sow stalls allow individual feeding and give protection from aggression and bullying by other pigs. Farrowing crates prevent the sow from rolling over onto her piglets and suffocating them. But the RSPCA and other animal welfare organisations (such as Animals Australia) are opposed to these methods because of the adverse effects of confined housing on the pigs' movement, social interactions and behaviour. Close confinement of sows is no longer allowed in the UK and sow stalls will be totally prohibited throughout the EU by the end of 2012.



Here in Australia there's now a trend towards housing growing pigs in a new style of piggery called an eco-shelter, where they have straw bedding and more freedom of movement. But breeding sows and boars are still confined.

A few producers are now using free-range methods. The pigs have the run of a paddock (typically about 20 pigs per hectare) and huts with straw bedding are provided for farrowing sows. The pigs live in more natural conditions but fewer piglets survive and the animals are more likely to be subject to sunburn and heat stress than when reared in intensive piggeries. Smaller piglets are also vulnerable to predators such as foxes and feral cats.

If you want to buy free-range pork, ham or bacon, ask your local butcher — but it's hard to find. And it would be helpful to have more informative labelling. Some animal welfare groups are arguing that if eggs can be labelled as 'cage' or 'free-range', the same can be done for pork products.

WORLD CONSUMER SNAPSHOT

MORE BENEFITS OF EXERCISE

If you have trouble sleeping, exercise can help, but doing it at the right time of day can be crucial, reports the US *Consumer Reports on Health*. A year-long study looking at women who exercised found that those who worked out in the morning (doing aerobics for at least 45 minutes) were about 70% less likely to have trouble sleeping than early risers who exercised less. But those who exercised just as much, but in the evening, slept worse than the less active ones in their group.

And Germany's *Test* magazine has advice for people who tend to get peckish and snack between meals. Scottish research found that a bit of exercise, such as a fast 20-minute walk, can satisfy hunger attacks just as well as a chocolate bar, the magazine reports. The study looked at overweight women aged around 50 who were asked to relax in front of the TV for two-and-a-half hours before dinner. After an hour — at 'snack time' — some of the women were given a chocolate bar while the others had to go on a treadmill for 20 minutes. At dinner time, however, both groups ate similar, moderate amounts of food. The moral: physical activity doesn't just burn calories but also slows down your appetite — two ways to get slim.

TIME'S MONEY

Also from *Consumer Reports on Health* comes some interesting information about the time patients in the US get to see their doctor. Research there has shown that on average patients get to spend only 16 minutes face-to-face with a primary care doctor — and that's after a 19-minute wait. In the doctor's room, they generally take 90 seconds to describe their symptoms, if uninterrupted, but they can usually talk for just 23 seconds before the doctor interrupts.

HAPPY 2nd BIRTHDAY, THREE-YEAR-OLD!

A beautiful children's birthday card with a bright, colourful, feathery character on top in the shape of a two — sure to impress a two-year-old. But stop: according to the manufacturer, it isn't suitable for children under three, reports *Which?* in the UK.

SUBSCRIBERS GO BEHIND THE SCENES

Thanks to all of you who entered the competition in July to be a guest at CHOICE for two days, to celebrate our 45th birthday. We were inundated with responses from subscribers keen to win a tour of CHOICE. In September our three winners (and their guests) checked out the inner workings of our test labs and photo studio, and met our research, testing, production, editorial quality, policy and consumer services departments. We enjoyed meeting them and hope they enjoyed their visit. Here's what they had to say:

"I was very impressed by the thorough and rigorous testing and research processes — I feel now even more confident of the published results. Thank you again." Therese Collins, Willoughby, NSW

"I had the most fabulous, marvellous time ... but enjoying myself was not the only benefit. After seeing your fridge testing area and talking to your testers I came home and turned my freezer down three points. I really appreciate you letting us all in on the secret world of CHOICE." Kay McSweeney, Studio Village, Qld

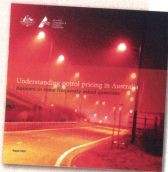
"I was surprised by the amount of work that goes into the production of the magazine ... the testing of products is extensive and the resulting percentages are derived from many types of testing. Thank you, CHOICE." David Pattinson, Buderim, Qld



some reasons; different wholesale prices and price support provided by the oil majors to their franchisees are others.

And then there's the question of prices that are already similar all seeming to change at the same time. While the ACCC has taken court action in the past against service station operators for price fixing, the courts have found that simply offering the same or a similar price isn't by itself a breach of the Trade Practices Act; collusion between suppliers (such as during industry meetings or by phone, email or in other formal or informal ways) needs to be proven.

You can download a free copy of the booklet from the ACCC website (www.accc.gov.au) or phone the ACCC Infocentre on 1300 302 502.



Hitting the road — and your wallet

If you're hankering for a trip round Australia in a four-wheel drive, rising fuel prices might be making you think again. In its Oct/Nov 2005 issue *CHOICE Money & Rights* took a look at what it could cost you, taking into account all running costs.

The bottom line is that for your transport alone, a 25,000 km trip could set you back around \$20,000 (and that's at May 2005 fuel prices in Sydney — around \$1.20/L on average). The 4WD you choose will make a difference: total vehicle operating costs for the trip would be around \$15,500–\$17,500 for the compact 4WDs the magazine looked at, to around \$20,000–\$23,000 for the medium and large models. (These costs are calculated from the NRMA's per kilometre costs, which are based on driving 15,000 km per year over five years.)

Engine size and power are one factor that makes a difference. For example, one 2.7 L automatic 4WD looked at costs 76 cents/km to run, while the same vehicle with a 4 L engine costs 80 cents/km. Four cents might not seem a big difference, but that's *per kilometre*: each 1000 km you drive will cost \$40 more than the model with the smaller engine — \$1000 over your 25,000 km trip.

On average, petrol outside metropolitan areas costs 2–3% more. Bear this in mind too when costing your trip, and fill your tank in city regions when possible. In fact in remote areas diesel can be more easily available than petrol, and while diesel tends to be more expensive, this can be offset by a diesel engine often being more efficient.

Money & Rights based its calculations on the NRMA's vehicle operating costs survey (using NSW prices), which takes into account:

- Depreciation of the car's value.
- Cost of funds (what you could have earned if you'd invested the money at an interest rate of 5.24% instead of buying the car).
- Registration, compulsory third-party insurance, comprehensive insurance and motoring organisation membership.
- Running costs: fuel (based on Sydney prices in May 2005), tyres, service and repairs.

If you'd like to subscribe to *CHOICE Money & Rights* call 1800 069 552 toll-free or go to www.choice.com.au/magazines.

CORRECTION

DVD RECORDERS

CHOICE, August 2005

The **BENQ JH300** DVD recorder in our test has progressive scan, as noted in the table on page 39, but only when playing discs recorded in NTSC format. Australia uses PAL format, so it won't be much use unless you regularly watch DVDs made where they use NTSC (such as the USA).

Strollers: are toddler seats safe?

If you've got a toddler and a baby but just one single-seat stroller, a quick and cheap solution is to convert it into a twin stroller by attaching a toddler seat. But how safe are they?

We bought three seat attachments: the **CHILDCARE Trio Toddler Seat 013702-002** (\$70), **STEELCRAFT Swivelrite Deluxe Toddler Seat 36815** (\$100) and **PHIL & TEDS E3 Double Kit E3DK11 V2** (\$100), to fit strollers of these brands from our recent jogger stroller test (CHOICE, June 2005). We tested the ease of attaching and removing the seat, the strength of their safety harness and crotch strap, and the stroller's stability with the extra seat attached and loaded. We also checked for finger and limb traps and the security of attachment to the stroller.



All the seats were easy to attach and remove, but otherwise the results were mixed. All of them had potential finger or limb traps. However, these are a small risk and we didn't find any major problems on the **CHILDCARE** and **STEELCRAFT**.

The **PHIL & TEDS**, however, poses other safety hazards:

- The harness straps slip too easily and the buckles can be removed.
 - Some attachment fittings broke under stress.
 - It has two configurations. In the one where the extra seat is mounted at the back (the handle end), the stroller can tip backwards if the front seat is left empty and the toddler seat is occupied. The manufacturer warns not to do this but we think it could easily happen in practice.
 - In the same configuration, the child in the rear toddler seat is close to the wheels and could reach the moving wheels or the brake lever. This assessment was backed up by a recent consumer complaint to us: their child, correctly harnessed in the toddler seat at the back of their **PHIL & TEDS** stroller, managed to reach the wheels and sustained a friction burn on the arm.
- The manufacturer said it's addressing the harness strap and attachment breakage problems. It also said the seat was designed so that a properly restrained child couldn't reach the wheels, but that it's considering adding wheel guards for extra safety. Until this problem is fixed, we think this seat attachment is potentially dangerous and shouldn't be on sale.
- For more details, see our free online article on stroller seats at www.choice.com.au.

Petrol pricing explained

We'd all have some idea why petrol tends to be more expensive in the country than in a large coastal city, but why some of us pay more for petrol on a Thursday than a Tuesday can be more baffling.

To help people understand the many issues surrounding petrol pricing in Australia, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) released a new booklet, *Understanding petrol pricing in Australia*, just as petrol prices skyrocketed to unprecedented heights in early September.

The booklet provides answers to many frequently asked questions about

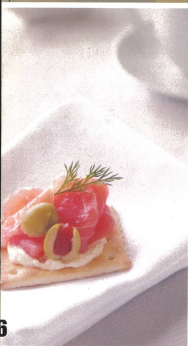
which there's a lot of misinformation in the community, according to the ACCC. It explains, for example, why petrol prices in Australia are based on international refined petrol prices (although we currently import only around 15% of the petrol we use), and discusses the factors that influence petrol pricing (including the Australian/US dollar exchange rate, government policies and taxes, the level of competition in local markets and domestic price cycles).

On this last point, the ACCC published interesting results in the booklet from its petrol monitoring over past months. If you're living in or around a large metropolitan city you would

no doubt have noticed that petrol prices there often move in cycles, rising rapidly over a few days and then dropping steadily.

ACCC data confirmed that in June, for example, petrol was indeed generally cheapest on either Mondays or Tuesdays in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth, but on Fridays in Adelaide. More information on how best to take advantage of fluctuating petrol price cycles, and regular updates, are available on the ACCC website.

There are various explanations for these fluctuations, the ACCC points out. Changing demands for petrol on certain days of the week and the level of competition in the area are



CONTENTS

November 2005

COVER STORY

8 LCD vs plasma TVs

Is one type inherently better than the other? Our tests find out.

Photo: Australian Picture Library

REPORTS

29 Sun safety

The dangers of UV rays and how to avoid them this summer.

TESTS

10 A burning issue

Tanning salons that ignore the industry's standards are putting customers at risk.

14 Balsamic vinegar

It's coming to everyone's kitchen — here's everything you need to know about it.

23 CDMA phones

Fine for use in Australia but you can't take them overseas.

26 Crackers and crispbread

There are bigger diet differences than you might think between brands.

32 Kids' bike helmets

How to get a safe helmet for your child.

36 A showbag of fridges

On test: five side-by-sides, five models with the freezer on top and a 'French door' model.

42 Petrol lawnmowers

Finding a good model for around \$400 or less.

REGULARS

4 CHOICE Cuts

7 Your Letters

18 Drivelines: Used car safety

22 Computing CHOICE: Smartphones on test

28 Hip Pocket: Fine line for financial advice; super choice

46 Food Bites: Fishy fish; can you trust nutrition info labels?

47 Consumer Bookshelf

49 Recalls and bans

51 CHOICE index: December 2004 to November 2005

52 The Hard Word

ultraviolet (UV) radiation, whether from the sun or from artificial sources such as solariums, can lead to premature skin aging and is a known risk factor for skin cancer. The standard even requires operators to display warnings to that effect (see *Information*, page 13, for more).

And while the type and quantity of UV produced by solariums and the sun do differ — solariums often claim to use mainly the 'safer' UVA radiation — both UVA and UVB radiation do cause significant skin damage and contribute to skin cancer. (See *Summertime*, page 29, for more on the different types and effects of UV radiation.)

■ Indoor tanning is good for you

We all need some sun for good health, but the amount required is very small (only a few minutes a day) and easily achieved without suntanning or using a solarium (see *Summertime* for more on this).

There's a common belief that a tan acquired using a solarium will provide good protection against sunburn for a holiday in a sunny location. In reality, a tan acquired in a solarium offers only limited protection against sunburn from solar UV — about the same as using an SPF 2-3 sunscreen. And bear in mind that if you have a tan, your skin is already damaged.

Certain skin conditions such as dermatitis and psoriasis can be successfully treated by UV devices, but qualified medical supervision in an approved medical clinic is recommended, not self-treatment in a solarium. Claims of solariums helping people to be more relaxed or have a feeling of wellbeing are more difficult to substantiate or refute.

The standard advises solariums against making claims of non-cosmetic health benefits when promoting tanning unit use. But the promotional literature from two of the solariums we visited blatantly ignores this guideline.

One salon's factsheet asks the question "Is tanning good for me?" and answers "YES — besides making you look and feel healthier, the tanning helps protect you from the harmful rays during outdoor activity." It also lists various ills (such as acne, eczema, rheumatism and arthritis) that it says respond favourably to tanning.

Another salon's literature says the sun and sunbeds "can provide protection and help" and goes on to outline their role in helping to combat

What we did

THE VISITS

In July, two potential customers, Louise and Chantelle, posing as aunt and niece, visited 30 indoor tanning facilities in Sydney (17 tanning salons, with most of the remainder being beauty salons). They told staff they hadn't tried indoor tanning before but wanted a tan for a special trip planned for the following month.

They also asked what indoor tanning involved, how much it cost, how often they'd need to come in, and if they needed an appointment.

Louise, a natural dark-blond with lots of freckles and some moles, has been told by doctors to keep out of the sun. With a skin type 1 profile, she should be warned against indoor tanning. Chantelle is 15, so according to the standard

she should be required to provide proof of consent from a parent or guardian before she can use a solarium.

If asked questions like: Have you used a solarium before? Do you tan in the sun? Do you burn easily? Do you peel? How brown do you want to look? Louise and Chantelle were told to answer truthfully.



GENE BOSS



GENE BOSS

THE PHONE SURVEY

In June, female interviewers posed as prospective customers and called 100 tanning establishments in Sydney and Melbourne. Selected at random from telephone directory listings, they included 63 tanning salons, 22 beauty salons and 15 gyms.

The interviewers asked a series of questions covering issues such as solarium safety and potential health risks, how often they could come, and if they needed eye protection. They also asked if it was OK for their 16-year-old pale-skinned cousin to use the solarium as well.

What to look for

If you're determined to use a solarium despite all the warnings about tanning no matter what skin type you have, there are some things to look for that will indicate the solarium operator is aware of their obligations under the standard, which aims to minimise your risk. Check that:

- Health warning signs informing you about the risks of using a solarium are clearly displayed.
- The solarium operator analyses your skin type — if you're skin type 1, they should advise you not to use the solarium.
- You're asked to sign and date a client consent form.
- Goggles are provided or available for purchase, and the operator ensures that you wear them.

- The solarium looks clean and hygienic.
- You'll be supervised while using the solarium.

Additionally:

- Some medications, including some antibiotics, antihistamines, oral contraceptive pills and drugs for treating certain conditions such as diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition or asthma, can make you UV-sensitive, so if you're taking any medication get advice from your doctor first.
- Before using the solarium, ask how to stop the tanning session.
- Remove any cosmetics, deodorants or perfumes as they may enhance your sensitivity to UV exposure.
- Leave at least 48 hours between tanning sessions.
- Don't combine indoor with outdoor tanning.

psoriasis, improve physical condition, stimulate the mind and reduce depression, among other things.

In recent years the ACCC has cracked down on similar claims made by solariums, which it thought were misleading to consumers. In April this year the ACCC won an action against a business for advertising that its solarium tanning services were "the safe alternative to Tassie's sunlight".

We've told the ACCC of our findings and it's investigating the matter.

EVEN WORSE WHEN YOU'RE YOUNG

Childhood exposure to UV and the number of times you're burnt by UV before adulthood are known to relate directly to the risk of developing melanoma later in life. The World Health Organization goes as far as to recommend that anyone under 18 shouldn't use a solarium at all, while the Australian/New Zealand standard stipulates that anyone under 15 shouldn't be allowed to use them, with those between 15 and 18 needing parental or guardian consent.

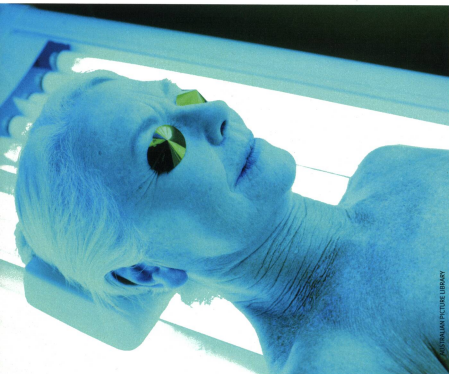
Disturbingly, our 15-year-old researcher Chantelle was asked about her age on just four of the 30 visits she made. On two of the four she was told to return with a parent or guardian, or to provide proof of their consent. On the other two visits she was refused on the grounds of her age.

When our telephone interviewers asked whether it was OK for their 16-year-old cousin to try indoor tanning, 64% of the solariums contacted said the cousin would need parental consent or to be accompanied by parents. However, 22% said "yes" without adding any qualification. Only 8% sounded a warning that 16 is too young to start tanning, one saying: "I personally won't do under 18s, it's just wrong."

SKIN TYPE

Someone with skin type 1 burns and doesn't tan when in the sun unprotected, and generally has one or all of the following characteristics:

- Very fair/white skin.
- Light-coloured eyes.
- Lots of freckles.
- Red or blonde hair.



Skin type 1 is more prone to sunburn and skin cancer because there's not enough melanin in the skin to cause pigmentation. The standard recommends people with this skin type don't use solariums.

Louise, despite having the profile for skin type 1, wasn't advised against tanning by any of the solarium operators visited. On two visits, when written material prompted Louise to question her suitability for tanning due to her skin type, she was told by an assistant that skin type 1 referred to people who are albinos. On another visit she was told her fair skin was "not a problem" as she'd only be coming in for a few weeks before her trip.

Only 10% of the respondents to our telephone survey unequivocally said the interviewer's pale-skinned cousin couldn't use the solarium on the basis of her skin type. 28% thought she'd have no problem at all, responding to the query with comments like: "Absolutely, will take longer, come in every second day, would take eight sessions to see the colour." Some responses left you wondering about the trial and error nature of the salon's procedures: "Tell her to have a go, if she feels she's burning tell her to get out."

GETTING SOME THINGS RIGHT

■ The standard says you should wait at least 48 hours between exposures, and warning notices should display this information. Staff in the solariums Louise and Chantelle visited didn't always specify this timeframe, but most let them know they had to build up their tan slowly, perhaps coming in for three sessions per week. They were also told that in the beginning, sessions would be more frequent; once their tan was established they would need less frequent sessions to maintain it. The large majority of respondents to our phone survey said it was only necessary to come in once or twice a week.

■ The effects of UV exposure on the eyes include cataracts and inflammation such as photokeratitis and photoconjunctivitis. Reassuringly, all the respondents in our phone survey advised that protective goggles must be worn in the solarium — one of the requirements of the standard.

INFORMATION

According to the standard, solarium operators should ensure that all customers receive and complete a consent form before starting a course of one or more tanning sessions. The information in this form is essential if customers are going to make an informed decision about indoor tanning, and can be a vital way to help screen out high-risk people from going ahead with a session.



Many of us have suffered sunburn like this, which is enough to damage our skin. But if you have skin type 1 (see below left) you can't expect to tan under any UV radiation, even in a solarium session — that kind of skin won't tan.

But Louise and Chantelle were shown or given a consent form or questionnaire on just six of their 30 visits (in a couple of instances they saw a form but it wasn't handed to them).

The standard also stipulates that warning notices, outlining among other things the risks of solarium use (see *Facts vs misconceptions*, page 10), should be clearly displayed in the establishment. Our researchers saw a warning notice displayed in five of the solariums they visited. While more may have had notices displayed, they weren't prominent enough for our researchers to notice them when making their enquiries.

OUR VERDICT

The poor compliance with voluntary standards shown by some solarium operators on our visits and in our phone survey indicates that customers aren't being adequately protected.

At the very least, high-risk individuals — young people and those with skin type 1 — need to be identified by staff and not allowed to use solariums. Customers also need to receive adequate and accurate warnings about the potential risks.

The bottom line is that voluntary standards don't seem to be effective, and CHOICE would like to see national regulation of the industry. ■

WHEN SOLARIUMS ARE A NO-NO

Don't use solariums if you:

- Have skin type 1.
- Have a large number of moles.
- Have a history of frequent childhood sunburn.
- Have had skin cancer.
- Are taking any medication that increases the sensitivity of the skin to UV radiation (see What to look for, far left, for details).
- Have received medical advice to avoid UV exposure.

VENERABLE VINEGAR

Balsamic vinegar can add class to your condiments collection.

IN A NUTSHELL

■ On test: 28 balsamic vinegars from \$1.50 to \$55.65 for 250 mL.
■ In general you get what you pay for. Our experts judged the majority of cheaper balsamics to be just OK. But we found at least one good-quality balsamic that won't break the bank (see What to buy, below).

Not even thirty years ago, balsamic vinegar would have been an exotic addition to most people's condiments collection. Now it's not uncommon to have a bottle in your cupboard, rubbing shoulders with the olive oil and tomato sauce. And the choice now available to us is bewildering — an initial survey of supermarkets, grocers and delis in Sydney alone found around 80 different products.

There's a lot more to this fragrant, dark brown syrup than you might realise. For one, the balsamic vinegar you can buy in supermarkets is likely to be quite removed from 'tradizionale', the type that foodies wax lyrical about (and which can cost in the hundreds of dollars for just 100 mL). See *What is balsamic vinegar?*, right, for the full lowdown.

OUR TEST

We asked experts to taste 28 widely available balsamic vinegars, bought from supermarkets, delis, providores and markets. Because most of us would like our ingredients to be affordable as well as tasty, we capped the price at \$60 a bottle.

Our panel of four experts each assessed every vinegar's appearance, smell, taste and aftertaste, and

WHAT TO BUY

Splurge

DE NIGRIS Aceto Balsamico di Modena Gran Reserva 25 \$55

Steal

MAZZETTI Balsamic Vinegar of Modena (4 leaf) **TEST BUY** \$5.95

Prices are for 250 mL, based on what we paid in July 2005.



gave each product an overall rating. We based our test procedure and judging criteria on information produced by the Italian Balsamic Tasters' Association (the AIB — Assaggiatori Italiani Balsamico).

It seems that, in general, you get what you pay for: four of the six top-rating balsamics cost over \$45 for 250 mL. However, the **MAZZETTI 4 Leaf** received high accolades from our panel, and at just \$5.95 for 250 mL it'll barely register on your grocery bill. We had no hesitation in naming it our Best Buy.

But the characteristics and qualities of the different products on test were varied (see the table, page 17, for details). So depending on what you're planning to use the balsamic for, any of the products in the top half of the table could be suitable. See *How to use balsamic vinegar*, page 16, for ideas.

WHAT IS BALSAMIC VINEGAR?

There are essentially two types of aceto balsamico (balsamic vinegar): *tradizionale* (the traditional version) and commercial (this is mostly what you'll find on sale in Australian supermarkets and delis, and is the type we included in our test).

Tradizionale

Tradizionale is made from the pressed juice (known as 'must') of grapes local to the Modena or Reggio Emilia area (usually *trebbiano*, but also *lambrusco* and other varieties). The fresh must is then cooked, simmering, for up to 12 hours, until it starts to caramelize, forming a rich, brown syrup. It's then left to ferment in seasoned wooden barrels made from various woods (oak, cherry and juniper, for example), which give different colours and flavours to the finished product.

Each barrel has a small, gauze-covered trap to allow for controlled evaporation. As the liquid evaporates, the flavour and colour intensify. Over a number of years, the must is transferred to progressively smaller barrels. *Tradizionale* balsamics are aged for at least 12 years ('*tradizionale vecchio*'), sometimes 25 and more ('*tradizionale extra vecchio*').

At each stage, some of the liquid is moved to barrels containing slightly older must to achieve the right balance of woody notes from the barrels, the right colour and the right taste. For this reason, unlike wine, you rarely see a date on a bottle of balsamic vinegar, as it's likely to be a skilfully blended mixture of several different ages. In fact, *tradizionale*

laws forbid the claim of product age on the label, as well as any reference to the presumed age. And while barrel aging is an important part of balsamic vinegar production, it doesn't necessarily correlate with quality — the origin and quality of ingredients heavily influence the quality of the final product too.

Because they're produced, processed and prepared in a specific geographical area using recognised know-how, *tradizionale* balsamic vinegars from Modena and Reggio Emilia have been granted PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) status by the European Community. And the labour-intensive, lengthy process by which they're made means that they tend to be very expensive.

Commercial balsamic

With commercial balsamic vinegar production the barrels are larger, wine vinegar is added to the must before the fermentation and the aging process is considerably shorter (but still at least 12 months), with no transfer from one barrel to another. Some even have caramel colouring added. Australian balsamic producers generally import the base must from Italy, and add wine vinegar produced in Australia (our taste test included four 'Australian' balsamics).

Sometimes commercial balsamic producers claim their product is a certain age — six, eight or 10 years, for example — but it's the 'mother must' that

WHAT'S WHITE BALSAMIC VINEGAR?

It's not balsamic vinegar in the true sense of the word. It's actually white wine vinegar blended with must that hasn't been caramelised (see Tradizionale, left). Recipes usually include it (instead of regular balsamic vinegar) for aesthetic reasons, so as not to colour sauces or dressings.

The history of balsamic vinegar

As the name indicates, for many centuries this vinegar was produced as a soothing tonic or balsam for the spirit and body, and it's also been used at least as far back as mediaeval times for flavouring meats and vegetables.

In the 18th and 19th centuries it was regarded as a precious commodity, and in wealthier families barrels of balsamic vinegar were often given as part of a bride's dowry. Methods used to make the vinegar varied, and each family's recipe and method were passed down — along with the barrels themselves — through the generations, maintaining it as a private and exclusive product of families from Reggio Emilia and Modena.

Despite its current popularity, large-scale balsamic vinegar production is fairly new. Until recently rural homes around Modena and Reggio Emilia merely kept enough for their own use in the family *acetaia* — a special loft in the apex of the roof where the sets of barrels are stored for aging.

It was only in the last few decades that balsamic vinegar was more widely put to use in cuisine and started to become a fashionable ingredient, gaining worldwide popularity.

provides the age component, and this may only be a very small proportion of the product.

GETTING THE REAL DEAL

If you're buying balsamic vinegar from Modena, one way to identify that it's authentic is to look for a seal with the words 'Consorzio Aceto Balsamico di Modena' (the Consortium of Producers of Traditional Balsamic Vinegar of Modena, or CABM). This guarantees the product's authenticity as a true balsamic from Modena, and certifies that the vinegar has passed chemical and physical analysis.

■ A burgundy CABM seal with the word 'affinato' (matured) identifies it as having been fermented for up to three years (and at least 12 months). The **MAZZETTI** (one leaf), **LUPI, DEL DUCA** and **ORTALLI** in our test all have this seal.

■ A gold and white CABM seal showing the word 'invecchiato' (aged) certifies that the vinegar has been aged for at least three years in a wood cask or barrel. The **FATTORIE GIACOBazzi**, **GINO TOSCHI** and **MAZZETTI** (four-leaf) have this seal.

■ CABM-approved *tradicionale* is sold in distinctive round-bodied 100 mL bottles created by industrial designer Giorgetto Giugiaro.

However the CABM is a voluntary organisation, and while many Modena producers are members,

some aren't, and won't be using this system. And more importantly, guaranteed authenticity doesn't necessarily equate to guaranteed quality.



THE LEAF QUALITY RATING SYSTEM

Another guide when buying is the four quality levels of balsamic vinegar of Modena established by the AIB. The levels are identified by a leaf rating (one to four leaves, with four being the highest quality — see above). It gives a guide for intended use (use one-leaf balsamic to make salad dressing and four-leaf for drizzling over ice cream, for example), and is helpful when choosing between products that use it (**MAZZETTI** and **FATTORIE GIACOBazzi**, for example), but again, not all of them do. ■



How to use balsamic vinegar

Different balsamics have a variety of flavours and qualities that suit different uses, so use the following as a general guide only, and check the tasters' comments in the table for the characteristics of the tested vinegars.

- Sharp, astringent balsamics — use for salad dressings, sweet-and-sour sauces and for sprinkling over stir-fries.
- Milder balsamics — ideal for marinades, barbecued or roasted meats and fish, and for warm sauces.
- Thick, rich, sweet balsamics — delicious drizzled over ripe summer strawberries or ice cream, served with chunks of cheese for dipping, or as a dressing for melon, Parma ham and figs.

Other suggestions for a good balsamic:

- Mix equal quantities of balsamic vinegar and clear honey and use as a dip for chunks of parmesan cheese on cocktail sticks.
- Drizzle it on omelettes.
- Transform 'poor man's dishes', like sautéed potatoes, by sprinkling over a few drops.

And with a *very* good-quality balsamic you could:

- Dilute it with water like a cordial, and enjoy it as a long drink on hot summer days.
- Sip it on its own after a meal, as a digestif.

Brand / product name (in rank order)	Score (%)	Tasters' comments	Price for 250 mL (\$)
DE NIGRIS Aceto Balsamico di Modena Gran Reserva 25	89	"A benchmark example. Clean, intense, promises intrigue." "Some complexity on the nose and some balance on the palate." "Beautifully well rounded." "Nice spice with fruit character."	55.00
MAZZETTI Balsamic Vinegar of Modena (4 leaf)	81	"A strong, even, persistent, textured, harmonious vinegar. Elegant, even." "An aftertaste of wood and spices." "Sweet, but in character for the richness."	5.95
FATTORIE GIACOBBAZI Balsamic Vinegar of Modena Invecchiato (4 leaf)	79	"Classic mature balsamic with vigour, body and persistence." "Good balance of fruit, sweetness and acidity." "Some aged characters in the raisined must." "Good must smell."	55.65
COLAVITA Balsamic Vinegar of Modena (Gran Reserva 25)	77	"Good, easily usable vinegar." "Balanced nose but predominantly acidic palate." "Lower end of sweetness."	47.95
LA VECCHIA DISPENSA Aceto Balsamico di Modena	73	"Strong cooked must smell." "Clean and fruity aftertaste." "Lacking in complexity." "Clear, candy-like sweetness."	45.75
DON MARCELLO Balsamic Vinegar of Modena	71	"Quite pungent." "Good weight and mouthfeel. Flavour is good though it finishes a little harshly due to high acidity." "Aftertaste quite dry. Almost toasted flavour."	27.00
GIUSEPPE GUISTI Aceto Balsamico di Modena (Casa Fondata nel 1598)	68	"Body is very good. Silky, even and persistent." "Initial sweetness overpowered by back palate acidity." "Earthy mushroom smell." "Zingy aftertaste."	51.30
MAILLE Balsamic Vinegar of Modena	65	"Good, even flavours." "A little unbalanced due to acidity." "Vigorous and persistent pungency."	6.00
ALWAYS FRESH Balsamic Vinegar of Modena	60	"Nice nose." "Smells of chocolate/dates/raisin/porcini." "A little fruit sweetness is marred by too much wine vinegar."	2.00
MORO Balsamic Vinegar of Modena	59	"Smells acidic, with hints of caramel." "More vinegar than 'balsamic', but nice."	2.00
BLACK MAGIC Balsamic Vinegar (A)	57	"Some fig and caramel flavours." "Very light-bodied." "Lacking complexity and character."	16.00
CARLUCCIO'S Aceto Balsamico di Modena	57	"Harsh nose and slightly acidic finish." "Pungent, acidic, grippy." "No aged characters."	20.95
CARLINI Balsamic Vinegar	56	"Nice balsamic aroma, with acidity coming through." "Some initial sweetness." "Quite persistent pungency."	1.75
SIMON JOHNSON Organic Balsamic Vinegar (A)	56	"Low sweetness." "Vinegary." "Needs more body to balance."	8.00
LUPI Aceto Balsamico di Modena	54	"Upfront sweet nose." "Lacks body. Is overly acidic and harsh." "Tinny aftertaste."	2.80
MAZZETTI Balsamic Vinegar of Modena (1 leaf)	54	"Too much like wine vinegar." "Aftertaste is vinegary with a touch of sweetness."	2.50
ORTALLI Balsamic Vinegar of Modena — Red Label	54	"Smell promises some juiciness, coffee and date." "Slight caramel aftertaste but acidic and harsh on nose and palate."	2.25
DE NIGRIS Balsamic Vinegar of Modena	52	"Some fruit aroma." "It is predominantly acidic with very little sweetness to balance." "Body is not up to it and falls away."	2.15
GINO TOSCHI Aceto Balsamico di Modena Invecchiato — Blue Label	52	"Aroma is an interesting mix of the fruity (dates) with the earthy (soy/meat/leather/mushroom)." "Pungency is a bit fierce." "Some balance but very short." "You can taste the wine vinegar!"	23.00
BERTOLLI Quality Balsamic Vinegar of Modena	51	"Short and tinny aftertaste." "Very harsh on nose and palate." "An OK wine vinegar."	1.50
COLAVITA Aged Balsamic Vinegar — Sweet Vinegar of Modena	50	"Some dark cherry and prune aroma." "Aftertaste is stewy — overripe, overcooked." "Lacks balance, length and charm."	2.00
IGA ISABELLA Balsamic Vinegar of Modena	50	"Lacks body and texture." "Very little in terms of fruit." "Fierce acidic attack."	1.70
ROSSINI Aceto Balsamico di Modena	44	"Harsh, vinegary and unappealing." "A bad vinegar, not corked." (B)	10.00
DEL DUCCA Balsamic Vinegar of Modena	43	"Quite harsh and bracing." "Acidic, unpleasant aftertaste." "Lacks any length or textures to carry any flavour."	2.50
CORNWELL'S Gourmet Balsamic Vinegar of Modena	41	"Slightly unpleasant burnt caramel aftertaste." "Very harsh on the palate." "Very dull aroma."	2.00
VOG (VICTORIAN OLIVE GROVES AUSTRALIA) Stefano's Balsamic Vinegar (A)	37	"Not faulty, just not nice."	13.95
VILUX Balsamic Vinegar of Modena	26	"Aroma is horrible." "Very unpleasant." "Has a strange, burnt-caramel smell."	3.95
ANCHOR Margaret River Premium Wine Balsamic Vinegar (A)	24	"Overpoweringly unpleasant aroma." (C)	4.00

* Bottle sizes vary, so for ease of comparison we calculated the price per 250 mL (the most commonly available size), based on what we paid in July 2005, rounded to the nearest five cents.

(A) Made in Australia, using Italian must base.

(B) The first bottle of this vinegar was judged to be corked, so a new bottle was opened and the vinegar retasted. The score and comments shown are for the second bottle, which wasn't considered corked.

(C) The panel considered this vinegar to be faulty, so a new bottle was opened for a repeat test. The experts couldn't discern any difference in the second bottle and the comments/score remained the same.

Thanks to our experts

We're very grateful to our panel of experts who sipped (and occasionally grimaced) their way through the vinegars. They were (from left to right):

- David Ridge — wine industry consultant.
- Rosalie Hassan — food wholesaler/importer.
- Roberta Muir — food, wine and travel writer, MA (Gastronomy).
- Stefano Manfredi — chef, writer.



Used car safety



Choosing a safe used car model could mean the difference between getting out of an accident with a fright or with a serious injury.

IN A NUTSHELL

■ The used car safety ratings are based on real-life accident data. They assess how well a model protects its own driver and the driver of the other vehicle in an on-road crash.

Many new car models offer sophisticated crash design and a range of safety equipment, such as front, side and head airbags, and intelligent restraint systems. But what if you're looking at buying an older car?

The latest used car safety ratings can help you make a decision. They're based on a study by the Monash University Accident Research Centre (and funded by state and federal road authorities and motoring organisations in Australia and New Zealand) that analysed more than one million crashes between 1987 and 2003 on roads in NSW and Victoria, and between 1991 and 2003 in Queensland, WA and New Zealand.

The ratings look at models manufactured between 1982 and 2003. They show the risk to the driver of being killed or admitted to hospital when in a crash (crashworthiness), and also how much the car endangers the driver of the other vehicle or an unprotected road user (pedestrian, cyclist or motorcyclist) involved in the accident (aggressivity), compared to the average of all models.

They also show the crashworthiness and aggressivity of the different car categories compared to the average of all cars.

If you drive one of the worst models for crashworthiness, you're at least 30% more likely to

sustain serious injury or even die in a serious crash than if you were in one of the best models.

THE MAIN FINDINGS

The results show some trends:

- Larger and more expensive used cars usually offer better protection for their drivers — not least because safety equipment such as airbags and ABS brakes weren't commonly found in smaller and cheaper cars until recently. But a few small cars also scored better than average for crashworthiness.
- Heavy cars (such as large 4WDs and some large sedans) often have good crashworthiness but bad aggressivity due to simple physics (if a heavy car collides with a light one, the light one is usually worse off) or, in the case of 4WDs, to the higher ride height.
- The safety of a particular model often (but not always) improves over time due to better crash design and improved safety equipment.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

If you're in the market for a used car, some of the above findings may not seem very helpful. You probably have a certain budget (so the safer luxury car may not be an option) and certain needs (for example, most of your driving may be done in



ILLUSTRATIONS: JAMES HUNTER

the city, so a large 4WD wouldn't make much sense).

So the used car safety ratings can only be part of your research to find the best model for you. Once you've decided on the best type of car for your needs, find the best model by comparing a range of aspects such as:

■ **Specifications, features and price** — for example, from our online used car database, covering all models available in Australia since 1960. For a limited time, the database will be available free on www.choiceextra.com.au (under 'Cars' in the index). 

■ **Repair costs** — the NRMA Insurance low-speed crash tests are regularly published in CHOICE (June 2005 and choiceextra have the latest results). 

■ **Safety** — as well as this latest real-life accident data, you can get safety info from the ANCAP high-speed lab crash tests (last published in CHOICE, July 2005, and on choiceextra). 

■ **Environmental rating** — the Green Vehicle Guide rates the fuel consumption and emissions of cars (www.greenvehicleguide.gov.au).

Make / model / year (in order of crashworthiness within categories)

SMALL CARS (A)

	1 Crashworthiness	2 Aggressivity
PEUGEOT 306 1994-2001	✓✓	o
TOYOTA Corolla 1998-2001	✓✓	o
HOLDEN Astra TR 1996-98	✓	o
HOLDEN Astra TS 1998-2003	✓	✓
HONDA Civic 2001-03	✓	✓✓
NISSAN Pulsar / Vector / Sentra 1992-95	✓	o
ALFA ROMEO 33 1983-92	o	✓✓
CHRYSLER Neon 1996-99	o	o
DAEWOO Nubira 1997-2003	o	o
DAIHATSU Applause 1989-99	o	✓
FIAT Regata 1984-88	o	na
FORD / MAZDA Laser / 323 1999-2003	o	✓
FORD Laser 1991-94	o	✓
FORD Laser 1995-97	o	o
HONDA Civic / Shuttle 1988-91	o	✓
HONDA Civic 1992-95	o	o
HONDA Civic 1996-2000	o	✓✓
HONDA Concerto 1989-93	o	o
HYUNDAI Elantra 2000-03	o	o
HYUNDAI Lantra 1991-95	o	o
HYUNDAI Lantra 1996-2000	o	o
HYUNDAI 5 Coupé 1990-96	o	✓
MAZDA 323 / Familia / Lantis 1990-93	o	✓✓
MAZDA 323 / Familia / Lantis 1995-98	o	✓✓
MITSUBISHI Lancer / Mirage CA 1989-90	o	✓
MITSUBISHI Lancer / Mirage CB 1991-92	o	o
MITSUBISHI Lancer / Mirage CC 1993-95	o	✓✓
MITSUBISHI Lancer / Mirage CE 1996-2003	o	✓
NISSAN Pulsar 2000-03	o	o
NISSAN Stanza 1982-83	o	o
PROTON Wira 1995-96	o	o
ROVER Quintet 1982-86	o	na
SUBARU Impreza 1993-2000	o	o
SUBARU Impreza 2001-03	o	✓
SUZUKI Baleno / Cultus Crescent 1995-2002	o	✓✓
TOYOTA / HOLDEN Corolla / Nova 1989-93	o	✓
TOYOTA / HOLDEN Corolla / Nova 1994-97	o	✓✓
TOYOTA Corolla 2002-03	o	o
TOYOTA Corolla 4WD wagon 1992-96	o	na
TOYOTA Tercel 1983-88	o	o
VW Golf / Bora 1999-2003	o	✓

Make / model / year (in order of crashworthiness within categories)

	1 Crashworthiness	2 Aggressivity
VW Golf 1995-98	o	o
HOLDEN / NISSAN Astra / Pulsar / Vector / Sentra 1988-90	X	✓
HOLDEN Gemini RB 1986-87	X	o
HONDA Civic 1982-83	X	✓✓
NISSAN Pulsar / Vector / Sentra 1996-99	X	✓
TOYOTA Corolla 1982-84	X	✓✓
TOYOTA Corolla 1986-88	X	✓
FORD / MAZDA Laser / 323 / Familia 1982-88	XX	✓
HOLDEN / NISSAN Astra / Pulsar / Langley 1984-86	XX	✓
HOLDEN Gemini 1982-84	XX	✓
HONDA Civic / Ballade / Shuttle 1984-87	XX	o
MITSUBISHI Cordia 1983-87	XX	o
LIGHT CARS (A)	XX	✓✓
DAEWOO 1.5i 1994-95	o	na
DAEWOO Cielo 1995-97	o	✓✓
DAEWOO Matiz 1999-2003	o	na
DAIHATSU Sirion / Storia 1998-2003	o	✓✓
HOLDEN Barina XC 2001-03	o	✓✓
HYUNDAI Accent 2000-03	o	✓
KIA Rio 2000-03	o	o
MAZDA 121 / Autozam Review 1994-96	o	✓✓
MAZDA 121 Metro / Demio 1997-2002	o	✓✓
PEUGEOT 205 1987-94	o	na
PEUGEOT 206 1999-2003	o	na
TOYOTA Echo 1999-2003	o	✓
VW Polo 1996-2000	o	o
DAEWOO Lanos 1997-2003	X	o
HOLDEN Barina SB 1995-2000	X	✓
HYUNDAI Excel / Accent 1995-2000	X	✓
TOYOTA Starlet 1996-99	X	✓
DAIHATSU Charade 1982-86	XX	✓
DAIHATSU Charade 1988-92	XX	✓✓
DAIHATSU Charade 1993-2000	XX	✓
DAIHATSU Mira 1990-96	XX	o
FORD / MAZDA Festiva WA / 121 1987-90	XX	✓
FORD Festiva WD / WH / WF 1994-2001	XX	✓✓
HOLDEN / SUZUKI Barina / Swift / Cultus 1986-88	XX	✓
HOLDEN / SUZUKI Barina / Swift / Cultus 1989-99	XX	✓✓
HONDA City 1983-86	XX	o
HYUNDAI Excel 1986-90	XX	o
HYUNDAI Excel 1990-94	XX	✓
HYUNDAI Getz 2002-03	XX	na

Continued overleaf

Smartphones

Your world in your pocket.

Essentially, a smartphone combines the functions of a mobile phone with a personal digital assistant (PDA), which can generally do things like manage appointments, contacts and to-do lists as well as word processing and spreadsheets. To be truly smart, it needs to incorporate these two functions without diminishing either. As well as all this, a smartphone needs to be able to connect to the internet.

The Sept/Oct 2005 issue of *Computer CHOICE* magazine checked out 10 models: the MOTOROLA A1000, NOKIA 7710, 9300, 6630, 6670 and 7610, PALMONE Treo 650, PANASONIC X700 and SONY ERICSSON P910i and S700i.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- Getting information in and out of a PDA is critical to its usefulness, so the magazine took a careful look at how easy the devices are to set up and make a connection (sync) with your computer. Most were good or at least OK, but the SONY ERICSSON S700i didn't sync at all.
- All mobile phones have some form of contact list, but a smartphone should offer more scope to add details and have a simple means of entering information.

WHAT TO BUY

NOKIA 7710	\$969
NOKIA 9300	\$1199

Although these models are relatively large and heavy, they rated best for performance and most features. However, the NOKIA 7710 doesn't have an alphanumeric keypad and is awkward to use as a phone against your ear — it would be better with an earpiece or headset. The NOKIA 9300 has a 'clamshell' design that keeps the alphanumeric keyboard out of the way of phone functions. It lacks a camera, but it's still a very functional phone and PDA.



Also, any changes you make should be transferred between your computer and phone without corruption or loss. Most contact lists in the tested models are reasonably easy to use.

- Keeping track of appointments and managing 'to do' lists is a vital function for any PDA, as it should be for a smartphone. The testers created a series of past and future appointments and tasks in Microsoft Outlook and checked that they all transferred accurately. None of the models that could sync with a computer lost any data (we couldn't do this test with the SONY ERICSSON S700i). The NOKIA 7710 and 9300 are easy to use and all the rest are OK.
- Email on the go is very attractive if it's one of the major ways you communicate. All the phones can download, display and create an email but, again, the NOKIA 7710 and 9300 are easy to use and the SONY ERICSSON P910i isn't far behind.
- The size and clarity of the screen are important because it has to display more than a name and phone number. We looked at each model's ability to show detail when viewing all the functions mentioned above. The models in the *What to buy* list both have a relatively large screen, which makes them particularly handy when dealing with text.

FEATURES TO LOOK FOR

Not all the tested models have all the following features:

- **Touchscreen** — the ability to use a

stylus to quickly scroll a screen up or down, select an item on the screen or move the cursor from one place to another makes using the PDA functions on a smartphone much quicker and simpler than using the keypad.

■ **Alphanumeric keypad** — phone keypads that require you to tap the same key several times to select letters or numbers are clumsy when entering lots of text. Small keypads with individual buttons for each letter are much easier to use, provided they're well-designed.

■ **Bluetooth** — a smartphone can use it to communicate without wires with a computer or device such as a headset. Bluetooth-enabled devices can communicate up to 10 metres apart without needing to be in direct line of sight.

■ **Flash memory card** — removable storage is handy for images and messages.

■ **Camera** — a resolution of about 640 x 480 pixels, often called VGA resolution, is OK for sending an image over a phone line, but don't expect to get a good-quality normal-sized (10 x 15 cm) print. Even smartphones with a camera of around one megapixel (about 1152 x 864 pixels) have trouble producing good prints.

Computer CHOICE, Sep/Oct 2005, has full test results as well as handset specifications. If you'd like to subscribe, go to www.choice.com.au or call 1800 069 552 toll-free.

I'll go no more a-roamin' ...

A CDMA mobile offers you better coverage than a GSM outside metropolitan areas, but you can't use it overseas.

CDMA is one of three mobile phone technologies currently used in Australia (see below). There are two network providers for it: Telstra (covering most of Australia) and Orange (covering major cities, and automatically switching you to the Telstra network elsewhere).

The CDMA phones market is quite small, but moves very fast — models often aren't available for long, and new ones are released all the time. We tested the seven models that were available at the time we bought our test samples, and that were supposed to still be available by this month. Unfortunately, one of them has been discontinued after all, so we can only report on six.

CDMA, GSM OR 3G?

Is CDMA for you? That depends on where you live, and how you want to use your mobile.

CDMA is typically best if you regularly use your phone outside metropolitan areas. According to Telstra, its CDMA network covers twice the geographical area of its GSM network, and more than 98% of the Australian population (compared to around 96% covered by GSM).

But far more Australians own a GSM phone, and GSM has some important advantages over CDMA. It usually offers better coverage inside city buildings, and you can use your GSM phone in more than 100 overseas countries when travelling (this is called international roaming).

Telstra CDMA currently only allows you to roam in New Zealand. Orange doesn't provide international roaming at all.

There are also third-generation (or 3G) networks operated by Telstra and 3. One of their main features is video talk: if you and the person you're calling both have a 3G handset with a video camera, you can see each other while talking.

The full range of 3G features (including video talk) is currently only available in certain areas (most capital cities). Outside these zones, 3G phones are

using the Telstra GSM network, and the functionality is limited to talk, messaging and email. International roaming is possible.

WHICH PHONE FOR WHAT?

Overall, the NOKIA 6255 was the clear winner in our test, standing out in several aspects. There wasn't all that much between the other models, and if you're after a small, lightweight, no-frills phone or want to use the Orange network (where the 6255 isn't available), the NOKIA 2112 is great value (see *What to buy*, page 24, for more).

■ **Battery:** We simulated fairly heavy use (see note 9, page 25), and even the weakest battery lasted for three days. But if extra-long battery life is important to you, consider the KYOCERA KX440 or NOKIA 2112 (it's probably not surprising that both models have a relatively small screen, which puts less drain on the battery).

■ **Sensitivity:** The NOKIA 6255 was able to maintain a connection much further into a tunnel (see note 3) than the other models, and is clearly the best choice if you live in an area with a weak signal. There wasn't much between the other models.

■ **Sound quality:** This was generally good. In our tests, the KYOCERA Soho KX1 and NOKIA 3205 coped better with background noise than the others. But to put it in perspective, a digital landline we also included in the test for comparison clearly provided better sound quality than all the mobiles with and without background noise.

■ **Ease of use:** Everyday functions, such as storing and dialling phonebook numbers, are quite easy to use on all the tested phones.

IN A NUTSHELL

■ Our test of six CDMA mobile phones had a clear winner (the NOKIA 6255), but the other models are still good phones if you want a different style or features.

■ Not all the models are available on both CDMA networks, or with all phone plans — check with Orange and Telstra for details.

■ There's one exception to not being able to use your CDMA phone overseas: if you're with Telstra you can use it in New Zealand.



PERFORMANCE

Brand / model (in rank order)	1 Overall score (%)	2 Battery score (%)	3 Sensitivity score (%)	4 Sound quality score (%)	5 Everyday use score (%)	5 SMS score (%)	5 Ergonomics score (%)	6 Versatility score (%)	7 Portability score (%)	8 Durability score (%)	9 Number calls and per charge
NOKIA 6255	78	67	90	70	81	80	80	83	67	90	64
NOKIA 2112	67	74	60	70	77	70	69	28	86	90	80
KYOCERA Koi KX2	66	52	60	65	80	83	76	51	68	100	50
NOKIA 3205 (A)	66	55	60	75	76	70	62	54	82	90	46
KYOCERA Push To Talk KX440	64	74	55	70	73	63	64	29	55	100	80
KYOCERA Soho KX1	62	48	50	80	76	67	72	37	76	90	42

There are bigger differences for sending text messages and for the phones' ergonomics (key layout, screen, intuitiveness of menu). The KYOCERA Koi KX2 and NOKIA 6255 have large, clear screens and well laid-out keypads.

■ **Versatility:** If you're after a phone with all the bells and whistles, be it for use as a mobile office (built-in modem, Bluetooth, computer connection, organiser, etc) or for fun and games (large screen, built-in camera, MMS, video capable, etc), you can't go past the NOKIA 6255, which is loaded with such advanced features.

■ **Portability:** In general, the weight and size of CDMA models is comparable to GSM phones. The NOKIA 2112 is the smallest and lightest of the six tested.

■ **Durability:** We tried hard to damage the phones in our drop and damp heat storage tests (see note 8), but to no avail. Apart from a few detached battery covers and batteries, and some temporary condensation on the display, all the models proved to be very tough, and didn't suffer any functional damage.

What to buy

Models are profiled in rank order.

NOKIA 6255

Price: \$569; available on the Telstra network only. This is the pick of the pack if you live in an area with a weak signal and/or want a phone with all the bells and whistles. It has a camera.

GOOD POINTS

- By far the best sensitivity (ability to pick up a signal).
- By far the most versatile — packed with features.
- Easiest to use overall, with a very good screen.
- MP3 player.
- FM radio.

BAD POINTS

- Among the heavier models in the test.



What to look for

FEATURES IN THE TABLE

■ **Voice recording:** Allows you to record voice memos or reminders.

■ **Communication features:** These are particularly important if you want to use your phone as a mobile office. An **IR (infrared) port** allows easy data transfer to your computer. A **built-in modem** enables you to send and receive email. And **Bluetooth** is wireless technology that allows a range of electronic devices (such as mobiles, mobile phone car kits, computers and PDAs) to communicate with each other over a range of up to about 10 metres.

■ **Built-in camera:** As a comparison, most new digital cameras have a resolution of at least three megapixels, while the highest of the phones tested (three of the six have a camera) is 1.2 megapixels. Some models also allow you to record video clips.

FEATURES AND FUNCTIONS ALL HAVE

- One-year warranty.
- Li-ion battery.
- Charger.
- Colour display (except the NOKIA 2112).
- Keypad locking.

- At least 15 polyphonic ring tones.
- At least 200 phonebook spaces.
- At least eight speed-dial spaces (some have significantly more).
- Alarm clock.
- Stop watch.
- Calendar/organiser: Allows you to manage your appointments.
- Calculator.
- At least three games.
- SMS: Allows you to send and receive short text messages. All but the NOKIA 2112 also allow you to send and receive multimedia messages (MMS) with photo and/or audio attachments.

10 FEATURES					SPECIFICATIONS									
Large screen (in)	Voice recording	IR port	Built-in modem	Bluetooth	Video camera	Camera resolution (megapixels)	Networks it can be used on	Antenna	Weight (g)*	Dimensions (L x W x D, mm)**	11 Claimed SAR value (W / kg)	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Price (\$†)
0	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	0.3	Telstra	Extendable	126	109 x 48 x 28	0.84	China	Nokia	569
5	✓	✓	✓	✓	na	na	Telstra / Orange	Internal	85	102 x 42 x 21	0.81	Korea	Nokia	189
5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1.2	Telstra	Extendable	118	117 x 50 x 25	1.32	USA	Kyocera	679
5	✓	✓	✓	✓	na	0.3	Telstra / Orange	Internal	96	108 x 45 x 21	0.71	Korea	Nokia	349
5	✓	✓	✓	✓	na	na	Telstra	Fixed	128	133 x 50 x 30	0.60	USA	Kyocera	409
5	✓	✓	✓	✓	na	na	Telstra	Fixed	98	110 x 45 x 25	0.99	USA	Kyocera	359

* Including battery.

** With lid closed, where applicable.

† Recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in September 2005.

na Not applicable — no camera.

(A) Discontinued, but stock may still be available.

NOKIA 2112

Price: \$189; available on the Telstra and Orange networks. If you want a mobile mainly to make and receive phone calls and text messages, this is a good no-frills model, with no camera. It's also the better of the two phones on test that are available on the Orange network.

GOOD POINTS

- Equal-longest battery life.
- Lightest and smallest phone in the test.

BAD POINTS

- Display isn't in colour.
- Comparatively long battery charging time.
- Not very versatile — lacks advanced features, though it does have a built-in modem to send and receive email.



- Voice dialling: Allows you to record a word (for example, the name of a person) together with a phone number, and to dial the number by saying the word.
- Vibration mode: You can set the phone to vibrate instead of ring — useful if you need to have your phone on while you're in a meeting or restaurant, where a ringing phone would bother others.
- Hands-free speakerphone.
- Web browser/WAP: Allows you to access web-like applications available over the mobile network (for example, information on weather, sports results or the share market).

1 Overall score

The overall score is based on a combination of the following scores:

- Battery: 20%.
- Sensitivity: 20%.
- Sound quality: 15%.
- Everyday use: 10%.
- SMS: 10%.
- Ergonomics: 5%.
- Versatility: 10%.
- Portability: 5%.
- Durability: 5%.

2 Battery score

This score is mainly based on the number of calls and SMS we could make in one battery cycle (see note 9), but we also considered the battery's charging time.

3 Sensitivity score

We used the phones in a railway tunnel to simulate an area with poor network coverage. Reception was good outside the tunnel, but became worse the further we walked into it.

We assessed the maximum distance from the entrance at which the phone was still able to maintain a connection established outside the tunnel.

We also found the maximum distance from the entrance at which the phone was able to establish a new connection. This distance is often considerably shorter than the one above.

4 Sound quality score

A user panel assessed the phones' sound quality for both incoming and outgoing calls, with and without background noise.

5 Everyday use / SMS / ergonomics scores

A user panel assessed the following:

- Instruction manuals (for example, presence of a glossary and troubleshooting guide, clarity of instructions), and daily use (such as storing and retrieving a number).
- Typing and sending SMS.

■ Ergonomic aspects (layout and size of keys, intuitiveness of the menu, etc).

6 Versatility score

We assessed the phones' advanced features and functions, and their suitability as a mobile office and for fun and games.

7 Portability score

An assessment of the phones' weight and size.

8 Durability score

We dropped the phones from a height of 80 cm onto vinyl tiles (eight times on each of their six sides — front, back, top, bottom, left, right), and assessed them for any physical and functional damage.

We also stored the phones in hot and humid conditions (around 40°C and 80% humidity) for 72 hours, and checked them for functional damage after each 24 hours. We then stored them at normal room conditions for 24 hours, and again checked for any functional damage.

9 Number of calls and SMS

We used the phones in the following usage cycle: we made one four-minute call and sent one 80-character SMS every hour for eight hours a day. We left the phones on standby for the rest of the time (except over the weekend, when we switched them off).

The number in the table is the calls and SMS we could make with the phones in this cycle before the battery ran out. This assessment is more realistic than the 'maximum straight talk time' that's often quoted.

10 Features

See Features in the table, far left, for an explanation of these.

11 Claimed SAR value

All the tested phones meet the Australian safety limit for their SAR (specific absorption rate), and according to the Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association (AMTA) should be considered equally safe. The SAR is the amount of radio-frequency energy absorbed by the body when you're using the phone.

However, if you're still concerned you can pick a model with a lower SAR. The number in the table is the SAR claimed by manufacturers and it's worst-case, as it's based on the phone working at maximum power. For more information, check www.amta.org.au/sar.

Crackers can contain more fat and salt than you might expect — which are the healthiest?

Totally crackers



PHOTOS: GENE ROSS

IN A NUTSHELL

■ Rice crackers and crispbread are generally a healthier choice than the more traditional type of cracker. They usually have less fat and fewer kilojoules — but you've still got to watch their salt levels (see Table 1 for details).

■ Bread's a healthier base for a topping or dip than most of the crackers in our test — with the bonus of being cheaper.

In Australia we nibble our way through about two billion crackers a year. CHOICE found at least 50 brands and types without even counting all the different flavours available in brands such as ARNOTT'S Shapes and NABISCO In A Biskit.

Table 1 includes 50 crackers, rice crackers and crispbreads in sizes useful for pre-dinner nibbles through to large enough for lunch. Where there were different flavours we chose cheese. We found big nutritional differences between crackers — worth checking out if you watch what you eat.

WHICH ARE THE HEALTHIEST?

Basic crackers are made from flour, fat and salt leavened with yeast or baking powder. Most are made from wheat flour; rice crackers from rice flour.

Other than that, manufacturers produce their many different types by varying the proportions and adding flavours.

And the difference between crackers and crispbread? Crispbreads are generally lower in fat and kilojoules. Traditional crackers are layered with fat (much like puff pastry) whereas crispbread is made from flour and leavening without the thin layers of fat. Rice crackers have no layering and little or no fat, which makes them also lower in both fat and kilojoules than other types. Flavoured crackers (such as ARNOTT'S Cheds and the NABISCO In A Biskit range) generally contain the most of both, although some plain crackers, such as NABISCO Ritz, are also high in fat.

Unfortunately even crackers that are low in fat can be high in salt (sodium). For example, SUNRISE Tangy Seaweed Japanese Rice Crackers have the least fat but are among the highest in sodium (927 mg per 100 g); BURNS & RICKER Bagel Crisps have the least sodium (202 mg per 100 g) but are among those higher in fat. Check Table 1 for the worst offenders for high fat and/or salt.

Some brands boast that they're 'baked not fried'. This is a really empty claim — all crackers are baked.

MATTERS OF TASTE

The flavour you choose can make a big difference to the amount of fat and salt in your crackers. As an example, we compared the fat and salt levels in the different flavours of ARNOTT'S Shapes and found some big differences (see

Table 2, above right, for details). The NABISCO In A Biskit range has similar variations — Cheddar In A Biskit is highest in sodium, Crispy Bacon In A Biskit the highest in kilojoules.

Check the nutrition information panels — you might be lucky enough to find that your favourite-flavour nibble has less fat or salt than some of the others.

BREAD'S THE WINNER

Bread, such as flat (pita) bread (included in Table 1), is generally a healthier base for a topping or a dip. It has fewer kilojoules, less fat and less salt than most of the crackers in the table, with the bonus that it's cheaper. Vegies, such as carrot and celery sticks, are another good choice for dips.

Table 1. Fat, salt and kilojoules

Brand (from lowest to highest in fat)	1 Fat (%)	1 kJ per 100 g	2 High sodium	Packet size (g)	3 Price per 100 g (\$)
SUNRISE Tangy Seaweed Japanese Rice Crackers	0.3	1582	XX	100	1.90
NABISCO Premium Crispbread	1.5	1560	XX	250	0.64
NABISCO Premium Crispbread High Fibre	2.0	1520	XX	250	0.64
White flat bread (pita)	2.0	1167	na	0.50	
RYVITA Original Rye Crispbread	2.1	1447		250	0.78
ARNOTT'S Jatz Light	2.5	1690	X	180	1.25
ARNOTT'S Salada Light Original	2.5	1640	XX	250	0.82
PARADISE Lites White Crispbread	2.9	1650		200	0.88
PARADISE Lites Wholemeal Crispbread	2.9	1586		200	0.85
TRIDENT Plain Rice Crackers	2.9	1710		100	1.38
SAKATA Occasions	3.0	1580		100	2.15
FANTASTIC Original Rice Crackers	3.6	1694		100	2.10
KINGSBREAD Toasted Crispbread Cracked Pepper and Poppyseed	4.1	1700	X	100	2.65
WATERTHINS	4.2	1679	XX	150	1.67
COLES Plain Rice Crackers	4.5	1726	XX	100	1.35
ARNOTT'S Water Cracker Original	7.2	1780	X	125	1.23
CARR'S Table Water Biscuits	7.6	1714	X	125	1.07
ARNOTT'S Vita-Weat Crispbread	8.5	1680		250	0.94
DICK SMITH Water Cracker	8.8	1740		125	0.94
FANTASTIC Sohos Cheese Delight	8.8	1640	X	100	1.78
FARMLAND Water Crackers Original	8.8	1740		125	0.79
HOME BRAND Water Crackers	8.8	1740		125	0.79
ARNOTT'S Water Cracker Sesame	9.2	1820	X	125	1.25
ARNOTT'S Salada Original	9.4	1700	XX	250	0.82
SAKATA Snakata Cheese Supreme	10.0	1770		100	1.90
NABISCO Captain's Table Water Crackers Classic	11.4	1840		125	1.22
NABISCO Wheatworth	11.5	1726	XX	250	0.66
KURRAJONG KITCHENS Lavosh	12.1	1780	X	140	1.82
ARNOTT'S Cruskies Original	12.6	1820	X	125	1.51
FARMLAND Family Cracker Biscuits	14.1	1830	X	250	0.44
HOME BRAND Traditional	14.1	1830	X	250	0.44
NABISCO Premium Wholemeal Crispbread	14.1	1830	XX	250	0.82
ARNOTT'S Country Cheese	14.3	1820	XX	250	1.12
FARMLAND Cracker Biscuits Original	15.2	1580	X	250	0.53
HOME BRAND Plain Snack	15.2	1580	X	250	0.44
BURNS & RICKER Bagel Crisps Plain	15.5	1890		170	1.85
ARNOTT'S Sao Original	16.6	1900	X	250	0.72
ARNOTT'S Saltine Crispbreads	17.1	1890	XX	250	1.12
ARNOTT'S Shapes Cheese Triangles	18.0	1930	X	165	1.28
ARNOTT'S Jatz Original	18.5	1960	XX	250	0.90
ARNOTT'S Jatz Minis Cheddar	19.5	2020	XX	250	0.93
ARNOTT'S Sesame Wheat	19.6	1930	XX	250	1.08
ARNOTT'S Savoy Original	20.5	1970	XX	250	0.90
PARADISE Veri Dell Spring Onion Crackers	20.9	1900	X	150	0.89
HOME BRAND Barbecue Snax	21.0	2050		200	0.60
NABISCO In A Biskit Cheese	21.9	2044	X	200	0.63
ARNOTT'S Breton	22.1	2010	XX	200	1.13
NABISCO Mini Ritz Original Flavour	22.4	2044		125	1.35
ARNOTT'S Clix	24.7	2150	X	250	0.84
NABISCO Ritz	25.5	2370	XX	250	0.86
ARNOTT'S Cheds	27.5	2090	XX	250	1.22

Table 2. Arnott's Shapes

Flavour (from lowest to highest in fat)	1 Fat (%)	2 High sodium
Nacho Cheese	17.0	XX
Cheese & Bacon	17.2	X
Cheese Triangles	18.0	X
Sweet Chilli & Sour Cream	19.2	XX
Roasted Garlic & Parmesan	21.6	XX
Barbecue	21.7	XX
Pizza	22.3	X
Savoury	22.5	XX
Cheddar	27.4	XX
Chicken Crispy	28.8	XX

1 Fat and kilojoules

These are taken from the nutrition information panel on the packet.

2 High sodium

X 600–800 mg of sodium per 100 g of crackers. This means if you eat a 30 g serve (on average about eight small crackers) it amounts to 20–27% of the lower recommended daily sodium intake

for adults, and up to 50% for children aged between four and seven.

XX More than 800 mg per 100 g of crackers.

3 Price per 100 g

Based on prices we paid for the pack sizes noted in the table in Sydney supermarkets in July and August 2005.

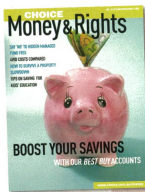
WHAT TO BUY

Low in fat and salt
RYVITA Original Rye Crispbread
PARADISE Lites White Crispbread
PARADISE Lites Wholemeal Crispbread
TRIDENT Plain Rice Crackers
SAKATA Occasions



If you want ordinary crackers rather than crispbread or rice crackers, the following are low-fat but high in salt
ARNOTT'S Jatz Light
ARNOTT'S Salada Light Original





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Will you switch super funds?

While 93% of consumers are aware of super choice, only 28% say they might consider switching funds, with 51% saying they're 'unlikely to' or 'would not' switch funds. These were the findings of a recent survey by ACNielsen.

Don't just stick with your current fund because it seems like too much trouble to change. Use the introduction of fund choice to review your current super arrangements and make sure your retirement savings are in the best shape possible. For example, if your fund's fees seem high, check other funds — industry funds in particular tend to have lower fees, and that can make a big difference to the amount of your eventual payout.

Don't rush into anything: there's no deadline for exercising your choice. Check the consequences of leaving your existing fund (such as a high exit fee). And if you're in an industry, company or public-sector fund with low fees and attractive insurance benefits, you may well find out you'd do best to stay put.

If you're thinking of switching funds, the most common types available to the majority of people are:

- Industry super funds, which generally have lower fees but a limited number of investment options.
- Retail super funds, which tend to have higher fees but a wider choice of investment options.
- Self-managed super funds. To set up your own super fund you should have at least \$200,000, and to be prepared to put a lot of effort and know-how into managing it.

There's more information on super choice at www.choice.com.au/money.



A fine line

Steve received a cold call from a representative of LJ Hooker Property Source, an arm of LJ Hooker Real Estate. He agreed to meet one of their representatives at his home.

Steve and his wife Martha met the LJ Hooker representative, an 'investment property advisor', for over an hour. During that time, they discussed Steve and Martha's financial situation, looked at their tax and income positions, loan and other investment costs, and considered options for the location and type of potential real estate investments. "Mostly we talked about how we could structure a property investment using negative gearing to work for us," says Steve.

Although the advice seemed generally good, Steve was surprised that the LJ Hooker Property Source representative, and the accompanying documentation, suggested they needn't bother talking to their accountant or financial planner until *after* they'd made their real estate purchase.

"Surely if you have a financial planner, you should talk to them before even considering such a large investment," says Steve.

During the meeting the advisor also told Steve and Martha that he wasn't a qualified financial advisor, and that the information provided wasn't to be regarded as financial advice. "I was a bit shocked," says Steve. "It wasn't supposed to be financial advice, yet we'd just gone through our tax and retirement plans."

LJ Hooker says it would be against its policy to suggest a consumer needn't talk to their financial planner or accountant first, but the documentation provided to Steve seems to indicate differently.

Under the Financial Services Reform Act, real estate agents aren't required to hold an Australian Financial Services Licence if they provide advice only about properties. They're only required to have a licence if they provide advice about financial products or negative-gear investment structures like managed property investment schemes — a standard investment property deal doesn't fall into this category.

Estate agents inevitably have to talk about people's financial situation when discussing property investment. However, cases such as Steve's illustrate that the line between investment advice and advice about property can be a fine one. CHOICE thinks if estate agents want to provide investment advice, they should be licensed to do so in the same way as other financial advisors.



SUMMERTIME...

Tips for protecting yourself from the sun.

Summer is the season to get outdoors and enjoy the warm days, but it's also the season when the sun's rays are harshest on your skin. Australia has clear skies, high UV levels, a mainly fair-skinned population — and the highest rate of skin cancer in the world. The message is plain: you need to protect yourself from the sun.

WHAT IS UV RADIATION?

Sunlight is made up of various types of radiation. Across the full radiation spectrum, it's mostly visible light and infrared heat that reach the earth's surface. But it's ultraviolet radiation, or UVR, that's the most dangerous for your skin. There are three types of UVR:

- **UVA** penetrates the skin, causes wrinkles and discolouration, and has been implicated in skin cancer.
- **UVB** is the most dangerous type, even though it's mostly blocked by the earth's ozone layer. Exposure to UVB causes sunburn, which can lead to permanent skin damage and cancer.
- **UVC** is less dangerous to skin and is in any case almost completely absorbed by the ozone layer, so it's not a major cause for concern.

HOW MUCH SUN DO I NEED?

You need *some* exposure to sunshine. Your body needs sunlight to produce vitamin D, which helps strengthen your bones and muscles and may also

help prevent diseases such as multiple sclerosis and certain cancers. Your diet will provide some vitamin D, mainly from fatty fish (such as salmon and mackerel), liver and some fortified foods like margarine, but most of your needs come from exposure to sunlight.

So how much sun should you get? Surprisingly little, according to a recent study by Australian universities. In summer in most Australian cities, you need as little as five to seven minutes a day (at 10 am or 2 pm, outside the hottest part of the day). Even in southern areas like Melbourne and Hobart you only need eight or nine minutes at most. And that's not on your whole body, either: just on your face, hands and arms is enough. (This assumes a moderately fair skin — see below.) See the table (page 31) for recommended exposure times in summer and winter across Australia.

Most of us probably get more than enough sun, but some people are at risk of not getting enough. They include:

- Elderly or infirm people who live mostly indoors and can't get outdoors much.
- Dark-skinned people: dark skin needs more sun to make vitamin D than fair skin.
- Women who wear veils and covering clothing as part of their culture or religion.
- People with skin cancer or conditions (such as lupus) where sun avoidance is necessary. They

IN A NUTSHELL

- You need to get surprisingly little sunlight each day to stay healthy — less than 10 minutes for most people.
- Avoid the summer sun altogether during the middle of the day if you can.
- Cover up with a shirt, hat and sunglasses. Put sunscreen on exposed skin but don't think it makes you bulletproof.

need to strike a careful balance between necessary and harmful time in the sun, and may need dietary supplements to keep up their vitamin D levels.

PROTECTING YOURSELF

It's not hard to protect yourself from sunburn. Sunscreen, the right clothing, a hat and sunglasses — and a bit of common sense — are all you need.

Time of day

- Keep out of the sun between 10 am and 2 pm (or 11 am and 3 pm during daylight saving).
- Stay in the shade. But watch out for reflected UVR: indoor or grassy areas generally have less reflected UVR — and therefore give better protection — than areas with bright reflective surfaces like concrete, sand, snow or water.
- Clouds absorb or scatter some UVR, but not all of it. You can still get sunburnt on cool or cloudy days.
- Watch the UV index on weather reports as a guide to how much sun protection you'll need each day.

Sunscreens

- SPF 30+ is best; it blocks about 97% of the sun's rays.
- Broad-spectrum sunscreens protect you against both UVA and UVB, ordinary sunscreens against UVB only.

Too much of a good thing

Some sunlight is good for you (see *How much sun do I need?*, page 29) but too much exposure to UVR and you can pay a heavy price.

- Tanning:** A suntan may seem desirable, but in fact it's a sign of skin damage. A natural tan does give a bit of sun protection, but only about SPF 4. Solarium tans provide even less protection; see our article on tanning salons on page 10.
- Premature aging:** Ongoing tanning can lead to your skin aging prematurely — becoming dry and wrinkled — and may lead to skin cancers.
- Sunburn** is like any burn, painful and damaging to your skin. If you notice sunburn appearing on your skin, it's too late to start slapping on sunscreen — the damage is already done. Get out of the sun and drink plenty of water in case you've become dehydrated too. If the burn is painful, bathe it in cool water. Apply moisturiser or a sunburn treatment to the affected areas. For severe sunburn, or if you feel faint or nauseous, get medical help immediately.
- Skin cancer:** The worst possible result of too much sun. There are three main types: basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma and melanoma. Of these, melanoma is the deadliest and can spread quickly.

Skin cancer comes not just from the damage done to skin by UVR, but also from the way UVR suppresses your immune system, weakening your defences against cancer. Although detection and treatment of skin cancer has greatly improved in the last 20 years, around 1300 Australians still die each year from skin cancer.

Check your skin regularly for suspicious spots, such as non-healing sores, red or pale lumps, or a mole or freckle that changes colour or size. If you find any suspicious spots, ask your doctor about them.

Water-resistant sunscreens are important if you're swimming, because UVR penetrates water for up to a metre. Reapply the sunscreen every two hours and after each swim (you're likely to towel some of it off anyway).

- Use enough — there's reasonable evidence that a lot of people don't. About six teaspoons (30 mL) are needed for your whole body — so if your head, neck, arms and legs (and maybe midriff) are all bared to the sun on a normal day you'll need a good proportion of that amount. It's a good idea to apply it once on the bits that aren't under clothing 20 minutes before you plan to go out and once again just before you go. You'll get better coverage, probably be using more like the right amount and be giving time for the sunscreen to interact and 'bond' with your skin. Don't rub it into your skin; it should glide on like a coat of paint.
- Store your sunscreen in a cool place, as it can lose effectiveness if left somewhere hot like a car's glovebox for long periods.
- Throw away sunscreens that are past their expiry date, or that have gone sluggish or separated. The active ingredient may still be OK, but it may not spread evenly on your skin, which could result in patchy sunburn.

Don't forget your lips: sunscreen can wear off them quickly — alternatives are a lip balm with a high SPF or a thick zinc or titanium oxide sunblock.

Manufacturers of sunscreens of SPF 4 or over have to be licensed by the Therapeutic Goods Administration and demonstrate that their products meet the claimed SPF, so you can be pretty confident that any SPF 30+ broad-spectrum sunscreen will do the job. Choose according to price and your personal preference.

Sunscreens are quite safe, but young kids and people with sensitive skin may benefit from a low-irritant version.

Clothing

- Medium-weight clothing will protect the areas it covers. Clothes that are too lightweight or have worn thin won't give good protection.
- Light colours let more light through than dark colours unless the material is thick enough to ensure the light is mostly reflected. So dark-coloured fabric usually provides better UV protection. But don't worry about this too much; a good medium or heavyweight white T-shirt, for example, will still protect your back.
- To protect yourself in the water, wear a shirt while swimming — but if it goes transparent when wet it'll be less protective. Consider special high-UPF swimwear, designed to be sunproof even in the



water. (UPF is the clothing equivalent of SPF — for more see right.)

■ A broad-brimmed hat or legionnaire-style cap with a neck-drape, or even a scarf around your head and neck, will help protect your face and neck.

Sunglasses

■ Your eyes can also be damaged by long-term exposure to UVR, so put on a good pair of sunglasses along with your shirt, hat and sunscreen.

■ Look for sunglasses labelled 'general-purpose' or 'specific-purpose' with traditional brown or grey lenses (rather than 'fashion' or unlabelled sunglasses), as these offer the best UV protection.

■ Ideally choose larger lenses — at least as big as a 20 cent coin — with a wraparound style to cover the top and sides of your eyes.

■ Normal prescription glasses — especially those with polycarbonate plastic lenses — give some UV protection, but for maximum protection consider getting prescription sunglasses as well. Alternatively, have your usual glasses treated with a clear UV-protective coating.

Nutrition

There's evidence to suggest that a low-fat, high-fibre diet with plenty of vegetables and fruit and not too much red meat reduces the risk of certain types of cancer, and of course it'll help keep you healthy generally. However, connections between nutrition and skin cancer in particular aren't well understood, though one study has suggested that vitamin A may help reduce melanoma risk in some people. ■

What do SPF and UPF mean?

SPF (SUN PROTECTION FACTOR)

This is the factor by which the sunscreen increases the time it takes you to get sunburnt. A properly applied coat of SPF 30 sunscreen will keep you burn-free for 30 times longer than normal, so if you'd normally get mild sunburn in 10 minutes, the SPF 30 sunscreen will in theory keep you burn-free for 300 minutes, or five hours. (Not that it's wise to spend that much time in the sun even with sunscreen on, especially if your skin is really so fair it would normally start to burn in 10 minutes. It just gives you a sense of the safety margin sunscreen can give you.)

In any case it's a good idea to reapply sunscreen every two hours, because water and sweat wash away the coating on your skin.

The highest claimable SPF rating in Australia is 30+. This isn't because SPF 30 is 'good enough' (although it does block 97% of the sun's rays), but rather because the SPF measurement method isn't completely reliable once the SPF exceeds 30. Some products labelled SPF 30+ may be much higher.

SPF multiplies, so if you've covered yourself with SPF 30 sunscreen, then put on a light shirt (the equivalent of say, SPF 5), you've got SPF 150 protection.

UPF (ULTRAVIOLET PROTECTION FACTOR)

This rating is for clothing and shade cloth: a shirt with a UPF of 20 allows only one twentieth of the UVR through to your skin. UPF ratings go up to 50, and a fabric with a rating higher than 50 is labelled as UPF 50+.

Different fabrics have different UVR-absorbing properties: generally, the thicker the fabric, the tighter the weave and the darker the colour, the more UVR is blocked. Clothes and swimsuits are available in high-UPF fabrics; look for a label showing they pass the Australian standard AS/NZS 4399.

RECOMMENDED SUN EXPOSURE TIMES

(minutes, in order of shortest to longest times in winter)*

REGION	WINTER: Jul–Aug, at 10 am or 2 pm	WINTER: Jul–Aug, at noon	SUMMER: Dec–Jan, at 11 am or 3 pm**
Cairns (A)	9–12	7	6–7
Townsville (A)	9–13	7	5–7
Brisbane (A)	15–19	11	6–7
Perth (A)	20–28	15	5–6
Adelaide	25–38	19	5–7
Sydney	26–28	16	6–8
Melbourne	32–52	25	6–8
Hobart	40–47	29	7–9

Data from Medical Journal of Australia, 21 March 2005.

* For moderately fair skin.

** Exposure between these hours in summer isn't recommended.

(A) Queensland and WA don't have daylight saving, so recommended times in summer are for 10 am and 2 pm.



HEAD PROTECTION

Protecting a young cyclist's head doesn't have to cost a lot, as long as the helmet fits well.

IN A NUTSHELL

- A label saying the helmet meets the Australian standard is a good indication that it's tough enough, but won't tell you how easy a helmet is to fit to your child's head.
- The better the fit, the safer the helmet will be. Get expert bike shop help if possible.

Helmets have been compulsory for bike riders, young and old, since the early 1990s. All states and territories require cyclists (and bike passengers) to wear an approved helmet — meaning one that's certified to the Australian standard — and wear it correctly. And with good reason, as a study by the Australian Transport Safety Bureau provides very good evidence in support of bike helmets for preventing head injuries. Since the introduction of mandatory helmet laws, the number of cyclist deaths has dropped sharply, although some surveys indicate the overall number of bike riders has also gone down.

While the number of overall cycling injuries has been reduced, nearly half of cyclists seriously injured are kids aged 16 and under. This high proportion is

probably due to the fact that so many kids ride bikes at least occasionally, but it reinforces the need for young cyclists to wear a helmet.

We bought 11 children's helmets priced \$10–\$70 from department stores, helmet distributors, bike shops and other stores, and assessed them for two distinct qualities: how well they absorb impacts, and how easy they are to fit.

ABSORBING IMPACTS

We put the helmets through the key tests of the Australian standard, including:

- **Load distribution:** How well the helmet spreads the energy of an impact.
- **Impact attenuation and deceleration:** How well the foam absorbs the energy of an impact.
- **Retention system:** Tests the strength of the helmet's straps, to ensure they won't stretch too far or break too easily.

Results of these tests make up the helmet's performance score (see the table, page 34).

The only helmet to fail any of the above tests was the **CYCLOPS Profile 1.0**. During the load distribution test, the test anvil penetrated all the way through this helmet.

Given that the standard is mandatory, it's surprising to find a helmet that fails — we were expecting only to be able to say which helmets passed the tests by a greater margin and so might offer better protection. Samples from each batch of every helmet sold in Australia are tested to ensure no manufacturing problems creep in from one batch to the next. Generally, four out of every thousand helmets are tested; if any of them fail, a further eight are tested. If any of these eight fail, the entire batch is scrapped. The manufacturer of the **CYCLOPS** told us its helmets are batch-tested according to regulations and it's never had such a failure before.

In case the sample tested was faulty, we bought two more **CYCLOPS Profile 1.0** helmets and tested them. Both passed the load distribution test.

All the other helmets passed the key tests of the standard easily, though some absorbed impacts better than others; see the performance scores in the table.

FIDDLY TO FIT?

To assess ease of use, our lab looked for:

- How easy the **chin and side straps** were to adjust and buckle up.
- **Nape strap** — a dial or slider on the rear of the headband — to help get the best fit.
- **Extra set of padding** for precise fitting and more comfort.

Major differences appeared in our ease of use

assessment, where helmets lost points for having no nape strap, fiddly buckles or difficult strap adjustment. However, because helmet fit varies a lot from one person to another, some lower-scoring helmets may fit your kid well, so they're still worth considering.

FIT FOR THE JOB

Fitting a helmet correctly is vital. The toughest helmet in the world won't be much good if it slips around on the rider's head when they fall off their bike. So how do you ensure the helmet is a good fit?

- First, if in doubt, get expert help. Any good bike shop will be able to help fit a helmet correctly.
- Get your child to help choose the helmet if possible, rather than just being there as an unwilling victim. That way they'll get one they're happy to wear, rather than something daggy that they'll take off as soon as you're out of sight.
- Place the helmet on their head so that it sits level, with the rim just above the eyebrows.
- Tighten the nape strap if it has one and adjust any extra padding so that the helmet fits snugly. It shouldn't slide around on the head or press uncomfortably at any points.
- Adjust the straps so that the 'V' sits just below the ear and is even on both sides.
- Do up the chinstrap, snugly but not uncomfortably tight.
- Now try to roll the helmet forward and backward — it shouldn't move very far. Adjust the side V straps or chinstrap if necessary. If the helmet still moves around too much after tightening the straps, try another size or model.
- Once you've got the helmet fitting properly, make sure your child understands this is the right way to wear it. Many kids push their helmet back on their heads when riding. This is dangerous as the helmet isn't securely in place and their forehead is too exposed in the event of a fall. Let your kids know how important it is to wear the helmet properly: it helps protect them, and it's the law.

TRY THESE FIRST

FLITE 900	\$33
MET Super Buddy	\$60
GIRO Rodeo G116	\$70
ADURA Dragster HG-EDG	\$44
NETTI Pilot TR-1	\$45
BELL Amigo US75B	\$60

Try these six first; you'll probably find them easiest to adjust. But if they don't fit your child or aren't comfortable, all the others on test are worth a try.

TYPES OF HELMET

- **Soft shell:** A foam shell with a fabric cover or no cover at all. None of the helmets we tested are of this type.
- **Microshell:** Has a thin plastic cover over the foam. This is usually glued or taped on, but some models are in-mould, where the foam is injected into the shell and bonded with it. All the tested helmets except the **BIG W** are microshell; it's hard shell.
- **Hard shell:** Has a thicker plastic cover over the foam. These aren't necessarily stronger helmets, but might withstand everyday wear and tear better than other types.



She looks happy, but she's wearing her helmet too far back on her head — her forehead is exposed if she falls, and the helmet isn't securely in place. It should sit level, with the rim just above the eyebrows.

What to look for

- Australian Standard 2063:1996 certification (look for a label inside the helmet). You shouldn't find any helmets these days that aren't certified, though they might not all carry the easily recognisable five-tick Australian StandardsMark (see right) — manufacturers have to pay to use that. Most state governments require bike helmets to meet this standard. The only exception is WA, where helmets certified to the US Snell standard are also permitted. The Australian standard is one of the toughest in the world.
- Easy-to-adjust straps, including a nape strap on the headband.
- Clips and buckles with pinch guards — but make sure they don't make the clips hard to use.
- Light weight.
- Good visibility.
- Bright colours or reflectors, so your kid is easily visible when riding.
- A sun visor, detachable or integrated.
- Good ventilation — most helmets have adequate ventilation, but if your youngster spends a lot of time riding, you might need to look for a helmet with better ventilation. If your kid feels too hot, they might be tempted to ride without the helmet.



GOOD RIDING

Where to go for advice on road rules and safe bike riding for both kids and adults:

- Check your state government's roads and traffic authority for the latest in road rules for bicycle riding. They vary from state to state.
- Bicycle organisations. In particular, Bicycle Victoria (www.bv.com.au) offers lots of advice on choosing children's bikes and cycling.
- Kidsafe Australia (www.kidsafe.com.au).

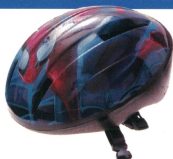
Profiles

Models listed under *Ty* these first, page 33, are profiled below.

FLITE 900

Price: \$33

It has a nape strap but no visor. It's marketed with a wide variety of shell patterns, such as cartoon and movie characters.



MET SUPER BUDDY

Price: \$60

Scored best for ease of use. It has a nape strap, a non-detachable visor and an extra set of padding, though we found the nape strap a bit hard to adjust. It's covered by a three-year crash replacement program: if it's damaged you can send it back (with the original receipt) for a replacement helmet at half the current retail price plus \$10 freight.



GIRO RODEO G116

Price: \$70

It has a nape strap, a non-detachable visor and comes with extra padding.



ADURA DRAGSTER HG-EDG

Price: \$44

It has a nape strap, and has the most ventilation of all the tested models. It has a non-detachable visor.



NETTI PILOT TR-1

Price: \$45

It has a nape strap and a non-detachable visor.



BELL AMIGO US75B

Price: \$60

It has a nape strap and a detachable visor; it's also the only model that advises helmets should be replaced after three years.



Brand / model (in rank order)

FLITE 900 (A)

MET Super Buddy

GIRO Rodeo G116

ADURA Dragster HG-EDG

NETTI Pilot TR-1

BELL Amigo US75B

CYCLOPS Profile 1.0 62010

ROSEBANK Tiny Tot TT2000

HUFFY HX1.1 63000

HEADSTART Skins Flame 325

BIG W No Limits MF-II

PERFORMANCE				SPECIFICATIONS				
1 Overall score (%)	2 Performance score (%)	3 Ease of use score (%)	Use and care instructions	Size (cm)*	Warranty (years)	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Price (\$)***
80	79	80	OK	48-55	3 months	Australia	Playworks International	33
80	65	90	OK	52-57	3 (D)	Italy	Cassons	60
78	68	85	Good	50-55	1	China	Pacific Brands	70
73	77	70	OK	50-52	1	NZ	Apollo Bicycle Co	44
73	69	75	Excellent	50-53	1	China	Netti Atom	45
70	70	70	OK	50-55 (C)	1	China	Pacific Brands	60
68	79 (B)	60	OK	52-56	ns	China	Hunter Leisure	10
66	75	60	Good	48-52	1	Australia	Rosebank Products	30
65	72	60	OK	52-56	ns	China	Hunter Leisure	22
55	70	45	OK	48-52	1	Australia	Headstart International	13
44	65	30	OK	50-54	ns	Taiwan	Big W	15



Cyclops Profile



Rosebank
Tiny Tot

WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

These helmets weren't as easy to adjust for fit as the top six models. Because correct fit is vital for safety we didn't rate them as highly as those listed under *Try these first*, page 33.

■ The **CYCLOPS Profile 1.0**, **ROSEBANK Tiny Tot**, **HUFFY HX 1.1** and **HEADSTART Skins Flame** don't have a nape strap, though the **CYCLOPS**, **ROSEBANK** and **HUFFY** come with extra sets of padding.

■ The **BIG W NO LIMITS MF-1** scored particularly poorly for ease of use: it has no nape strap or extra padding and its straps are hard to adjust. It's also quite heavy for a kid's helmet, due to its hard shell.

However, all these helmets passed the key tests of the standard, so if your kid likes them and they fit well, they're worth buying.



Huffy HX1.1



Headstart Skins Flame



Big W No Limits



Cracking under pressure: foam can crack when absorbing impact energy. The damage isn't always as obvious as this, so replace your helmet after any hard knock.

Babies on bikes

We tested helmets for young cyclists, but what about infants or toddlers in seats on the back of a parent's bike?

They have to wear a helmet like any other cyclist, so find and fit one as recommended in *Fit for the job*, page 33. If you can't find one to fit, don't take your kid out on your bike.

Even littlies riding a trike or similar around the backyard should wear a helmet. Not only is it safer, but it gets them into the habit of wearing a helmet right from the start.

Generally, the advice is not to take kids out riding on a baby bike seat or trailer until they're at least a year old. This is for two main reasons:

■ It's hard to find very small helmets suitable for kids this young. Also, they need to be strong enough to support their head under the weight of the helmet and under the acceleration and deceleration of the bike.

■ The jolting from the bike is bad for the baby's neck and brain. Baby seats are usually positioned over the rear axle, and the baby can't absorb the bumps with their legs like an older bike rider can.

Replacing helmets

You should replace a bike helmet:

■ After a crash or any hard impact, even if the helmet seems only lightly damaged. The real damage may not be visible.

■ If the shell is cracked, or the foam is cracked or crumbling.

■ After a few years of use, even if otherwise undamaged. UV light will decay the helmet. Three years is recommended as a typical lifespan for bike helmets. For this reason, avoid buying secondhand helmets; you just can't tell if they're OK.

And, of course, replace the helmet when your youngster outgrows it.

* The size tested; some models may also be available in others.

** Recommended retail, as advised by manufacturers in July 2005. We found retail prices can vary considerably, so it pays to shop around.

ns Not stated.

(A) Being replaced by identical model p00C, made in China.

(B) One sample failed the load distribution test — see Absorbing impacts, page 32. The scores shown are for the samples that passed.

(C) The latest models are labelled as size 50–56 cm, but the actual helmet size is the same.

(D) Three-year crash replacement program — see the profile, above left.

1 Overall score

This consists of:

- Performance: 40%
- Ease of use: 60%

While performance is important, all the helmets passed the standard tests — some just passed them slightly better. We therefore gave ease of use a higher weighting.

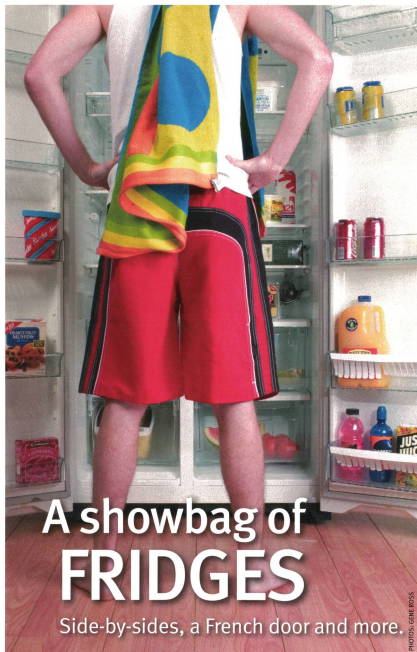
2 Performance score

This consists of:

- Load distribution: 33%
 - Impact attenuation: 17%
 - Impact deceleration duration: 17%
 - Retention system: 33%
- See *Absorbing impacts*, page 32, for more details.

3 Ease of use score

Based on how easy the chin and side straps are to adjust. Extra points were given to helmets with an adjustable nape strap or an extra set of padding, as these should be easier to tailor for an exact fit.



A showbag of FRIDGES

Side-by-sides, a French door and more.

PHOTOS: GAIL BOSS

IN A NUTSHELL

- On test: five side-by-sides, two three-door fridges, and five two-door with the freezer at the top.
- Fridges are more energy-efficient than ever, but is it at the cost of food quality?
- More fridges now have electronic controls and digital displays. But some have a mind of their own...

We've always said a good fridge/freezer should do more than keep your food safe — it should also be energy-efficient. But the results of our latest test show that with some new models, high energy efficiency seems to mean the right temperatures to preserve the quality of your food aren't maintained.

Large temperature swings — caused by extending the compressor's running and resting times — don't go with quality food storage, but they can help lower energy consumption. The temperature swings in many of the latest fridges tested are a concern. From the results of the tests, we think some manufacturers are allowing bigger temperature fluctuations in order to lower energy use so that fridges meet the requirements of the latest Minimum Energy

Performance Standard (MEPS 05), which came into effect in January this year.

SIDE-BY-SIDES

Side-by-side fridges (with the fresh-food compartment on one side and the freezer on the other, with separate doors) are generally comparatively poor for temperature fluctuations and temperature uniformity within each compartment, due to their tall cabinets. The top of each compartment is generally the worst area for this, so we'd recommend that you store particularly sensitive foods — like ice cream and strawberries — lower down.

The best side-by-side for minimal temperature swings is the **WESTINGHOUSE WSE6100WA**, and it's also the best overall of the side-by-sides tested.

Side-by-sides have also typically been high energy users, but thanks to MEPS 05 the energy use of the latest side-by-sides tested isn't much higher than models of the same size with the freezer at the bottom. See the table (page 40) to compare energy efficiency scores.

ELECTRONIC LIMITS

Electronic controls can be easier to use and, unlike conventional rotary or slide controls, often allow independent temperature adjustment of the freezer and fresh-food compartments. Most of the fridges we've tested recently have them.

Unlike conventional controls, though, they usually have finite temperature steps, not a continuous scale. If these steps aren't close enough together, you may have trouble getting a reasonable average temperature in your fridge. Many fridges have warmer and colder areas within the same compartment — ideally only from 1°C to 4°C in the fresh-food section — so if you can't adjust the temperature quite finely, you might get some areas in the fresh-food section in the food safety danger zone (above 5°C) or others below freezing.

This effect can get compounded by changes in external temperatures in summer and winter, and even more so if coupled with the large temperature fluctuations noted above.

For example, the **WHIRLPOOL 6WMV43NW** (a newly tested 430 L fridge with the freezer at the top) has only one usable freezer temperature of around -17°C — beyond that you jump to an extremely cold setting. And we couldn't get the fresh-food compartment colder than around 3°C in an ambient temperature of 32°C. This is particularly bad for the bottle shelf in the door, which can become much too warm at over 5°C. That's a problem if you store milk there, as it's likely to go off faster.

Fortunately most of the side-by-side fridges tested have good temperature ranges.

Profile: side-by-side fridge

Only one of the new side-by-side fridges tested made it in the *What to buy* list. For profiles of the other models in the *What to buy* list, see CHOICE, May 2005, November 2004, May 2003 (for extra-large fridges) and November 2003 (side-by-sides). You'll also find them in the appropriate month under 'fridges' in the www.choiceextra.com.au index.



WESTINGHOUSE WSE6100WA

Price: \$2009

GOOD POINTS

- Fast fresh-food cool-down time.
- Has temperature controls that display settings in °C (although the freezer is notably warmer than indicated).
- A good range of temperature choices for both fridge and freezer.
- Handles external temperature changes very well.
- Maintains reasonably steady temperatures as the compressor stops and starts.
- Sliding glass shelves in the fresh-food section.

BAD POINTS

- If the power goes off a defrost occurs a few hours after resumption, and if the power is off for more than about two minutes, the controls reset to factory settings.
- No chiller compartment.



What to look for ...

... in a side-by-side fridge:

- Side-by-sides can be very big, so check that the model you want will fit through your home's doorways before you buy.
- None of the recently tested models has an ice and water dispenser, although some have similar models with this option; see the table footnotes on page 40. But note that this feature will take up almost 30% of your freezer space.
- Slide-out shelves can make access to food easier in the narrow and deep compartments.
- If you store lots of fruit and vegetables, make sure you're happy with the crispers, as they tend to be very small.

For general information on what to look for in a fridge, go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on 'fridges' in the index.



WHAT ABOUT THE REST OF THE SIDE-BY-SIDES?

■ The LG GR-B197WVS has easy-to-use controls, sliding glass shelves in the fresh-food compartment, and a chiller. But the controls don't allow fine adjustment, the temperatures go up and down a bit inconsistently, and the freezer tends to get much warmer in cold outside temperatures, so you'll probably need to reset the controls in winter.

■ The NEC SBS-645 has controls that allow for a good temperature range, handles external temperature changes well, is easy to use, with particularly good storage versatility, and has sliding glass shelves. But it's let down by large temperature fluctuations as the compressor runs and stops, uneven temperatures in the freezer, and a chiller that's too warm (a chiller is best at 0°C).

■ The SAMSUNG SR5595NTD has controls that indicate temperatures reasonably accurately, provides a good range of temperature combinations, handles changes in external temperature well and has sliding glass shelves in the fresh-food section. But it's let down by particularly large temperature fluctuations as the compressor runs and stops and uneven temperatures within the compartments, and it has no chiller.

■ The SAMSUNG SR5535NTD has very good temperatures on its 'mid' setting and the controls allow a good range of temperatures. It handles temperature changes such as between winter and summer well, has good storage versatility and controls, and sliding shelves in the fresh-food section. But it's let down by very large temperature fluctuations and has no chiller.

WHAT TO BUY

300-375 L

FISHER & PAYKEL Elegance E372B (B)	\$1449
New FISHER & PAYKEL Tasman E331T (T)	\$1019
SAMSUNG Cool n' cool SRL316NW (B) ▶ BEST BUY	\$899
WESTINGHOUSE RJ362V (T)	\$1099

376-450 L

WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso RJ425V (T)	\$1409
FISHER & PAYKEL Elegance E440T (T)	\$1549
WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso RJ395V (T)	\$1309
FISHER & PAYKEL Tasman E442B (B)	\$1609
WESTINGHOUSE RJ442V (T)	\$1459

451-525 L

FISHER & PAYKEL Elegance E521T (T) ▶ BEST BUY	\$1799
WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso RJ525V (T)	\$1929
ELECTROLUX Kelvinator NB510J (B)	\$1799
FISHER & PAYKEL Elegance E522B (B)	\$1849

More than 525 L

SAMSUNG Cool Tech Plus SRL550DW (B)	\$1999
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Side-by-sides

New WESTINGHOUSE WSE6100WA ▶ BEST BUY	\$2009
WHIRLPOOL Gold 6DGD22CXHW	\$3799

(T) Top freezer; (B) Bottom freezer

All these fridges are good, while Best Buys are comparatively cheaper in their size range to both buy and run.

Newly tested two-doors

Of the five newly tested fridges with the freezer on top, only the **FISHER & PAYKEL Tasman E331T** made it into the *What to buy*



list. It performed exceptionally well.

It has a relatively large freezer for its size, good temperatures on its 'mid' setting, controls that allow a good range of temperature combinations between the fridge and freezer, it handles external temperature changes well and has good temperature uniformity within each compartment.

On the downside, it has large temperature fluctuations as the compressor runs and stops. The controls are a bit difficult to access and, although electronic, they don't allow you to set the temperature in °C. It also has no chiller.

The other two-door fridges newly tested are the **WHIRLPOOL 6WMV35NW**, **LG Icebeam GR-S552GTA**, **WHIRLPOOL 6WMV43NW** and **SAMSUNG SR502NXXA** — see the table for their scores.



The slightly unusual LG GR-B218WV model has a pull-out freezer drawer at the bottom and a fresh-food compartment up top that opens like a side-by-side fridge — or French door: hence the name.

FRIDGE FINISHES

■ There are many different metal fridge finishes. If you want your kitchen appliances to blend well, make sure the finishes match.

■ Many fridges can also be integrated — that is, panels that match your kitchen cupboards can be attached to the fridge doors to give a seamless finish to your kitchen. Just ask when buying — you may have to order a special version or a kit.

TIP

A five- to six-year-old fridge could use up to twice the energy a new fridge would, and an older fridge much more than that. If you have an old fridge in the garage (for beer or overloads, say), consider replacing it or turning it on only when you need it — it will save running costs and reduce your greenhouse gas emissions.

HOW RELIABLE HAVE SUBSCRIBERS FOUND THEM?

Fridges are comparatively reliable overall. Of around 8000 subscribers who told us about their fridge (bought in or after 1996) in our most recent reliability survey, 10% of fridges had needed repair in the previous 12 months. But there was a sliding scale here: only 7% of fridges with a volume of less than 300 L had needed repair, while 13% of people owning one of the bigger models (over 500 L) had needed to call in the repairer.

The graph below shows the results for brands for which we received enough replies to report on (at least 100). The numbers in brackets show the number of responses. A difference of 6% or more between brands is meaningful.

Percentage not needing repair

All fridges (8262)	90
LG (266)	97
Kelvinator (1006)	93
Whirlpool (445)	93
Samsung (186)	92
Westinghouse (2183)	91
Fisher & Paykel (2831)	89
Amana (120)	86
GE (239)	84
Maytag (181)	80

Temperature ups and downs

The **mitsubishi electric MR-CU375P** looks a little different with its three sections stacked above one another. The bottom is a pull-out freezer drawer, the middle a vegetable compartment and up top is the fresh-food compartment.

We tested the fridge with its controls set at various temperatures for both the fresh-food and freezer compartments. The tests were conducted at an external temperature of 32°C, which is fairly tough but realistic for many Australian locations, as well as being required for energy labelling tests; the icemaker was also turned off.

Under these conditions, on several occasions both the freezer and fresh-food compartment warmed up significantly following the fridge's regular automatic defrost, and the temperatures started to fluctuate widely. Those in the fresh-food compartment sometimes averaged above 5°C (with peaks as high as 9°C) for around eight hours, before cooling down again but still showing wide fluctuations. The fridge maintained this up-and-down temperature change and the fluctuations through several defrost cycles. This behaviour is very different from the steady temperature management achieved by most fridges, and which the **mitsubishi** also demonstrated at some other times during testing.

On one occasion when we opened the door (simulating usage) while the temperature was averaging above 5°C, it cooled down for a while (see the graph,

FANCY A 'FRENCH DOOR' FRIDGE?

While you might like the concept of this fridge, several performance factors let the **LG GR-B218WV** down.

It has temperature controls that display settings in °C and are reasonably accurate, but the temperatures go up and down a bit inconsistently. It has very good temperature uniformity in each compartment, a large chiller with a control, and sliding glass shelves in the fresh-food section.

However, the controls only provide limited temperature choices, particularly for the fresh-food compartment. If the door isn't opened for some time the fridge goes into a defrost cycle as soon as it's opened. This is a problem if, for instance, you're putting shopping into the fridge to be cooled and the cooling process is delayed by a defrost cycle. It also has very large temperature fluctuations as the compressor runs and stops, and reaching food in the freezer drawer is awkward.

For people with a disability

An occupational therapist from the Independent Living Centre (NSW) assessed the fridges in our latest test. We've combined her findings with those of previous tests.

■ All the newly tested side-by-sides are good options for wheelchair users, with the **SAMSUNG SRS595NTD** being particularly suitable.

■ Side-by-sides are also suitable for people with back pain.

■ If you have upper limb dysfunction, the **FISHER & PAYKEL** fridges with a freezer on the bottom would be most suitable or, if you prefer the freezer on top, the **SAMSUNG SRS502NXA**, **WESTINGHOUSE RJ362V** and **WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso RJ395V** are good. The side-by-sides are also OK,

although unfortunately the top-rating **WESTINGHOUSE** is the least suitable.

■ People with poor vision need good lighting and controls that are easy to read. The **ELECTROLUX KELVINATOR NB380j** and **NB510j** (both with the freezer at the bottom) are highly recommended and, with the freezer on top, the **WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso RJ395V**, **Virtuoso RJ425V** and **Virtuoso RJ525V** are good. Of the side-by-sides, the **WHIRLPOOL Gold** is recommended.

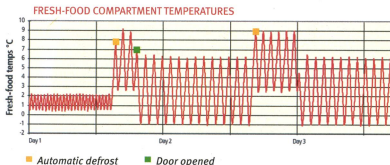
■ Someone with a cognitive impairment would find the **ELECTROLUX KELVINATOR** models and **WESTINGHOUSE RJ362V**, **RJ422V**, **RJ442V** and **RJ522V** suitable. Of the side-by-sides, the **LG GRB-197WVS** and **SAMSUNG SRS535N** are good options.

right), but continued to fluctuate widely, which isn't good for maintaining food quality.

Fresh food should be kept cold — no higher than 4°C — to maintain quality and help ensure food safety. Food standards recommend that risky foods stored above 5°C for more than four hours be thrown out. An ideal average temperature for the fresh-food compartment is around 3°C.

MITSUBISHI told us they're confident this fridge is safe and meets all standards, and that they've sold "many 1000s" around the world and never had a complaint about its food storage temperatures or spoilage of food. They said the fridge is designed

to alter its operating temperatures and go into energy-saving mode when it detects a "low workload condition", which can be triggered by combinations of various factors. In particular, if we'd had the icemaker turned on the fridge wouldn't have behaved this way. This may be true, but we're concerned that it's very likely some owners will run the fridge



These temperatures were measured in the top shelf of the fresh-food section over three days, and show the worst case of the increases and fluctuations in temperature discussed on the left. The freezer behaved in a similar fashion.

in a way that could result in the temperatures increasing and fluctuating widely, as in our tests. If that happened, you'd probably start wondering why foods like milk were going off faster than usual, without realising your fridge had changed temperatures of its own accord.

This was the second sample of this **MITSUBISHI** model we tested — we'd thought the first one was faulty, but in fact it was just behaving the same way. The fridge's up-and-down temperatures under our test conditions didn't allow us to score it meaningfully, so it isn't included in the table of tested fridges (page 40).

If you own a **MITSUBISHI ELECTRIC MR-CU375P** fridge and think it has problems maintaining appropriate temperatures, contact the manufacturer for advice on its Customer Care Service line: 1300 651 808.



PERFORMANCE

Brand / model (in rank order within groups)	1 Overall score (%)	2 Ease of use score (%)	3 Temperature performance score (%)	4 Energy efficiency score (%)	5 Crisper freshness score (%)	6 Cooling score (%)	7 Cooling time (hr:min)	8 Claimed / measured energy use (kWh / year)	9 Noise level
300-375 L									
FISHER & PAYKEL Elegance E372B (A)	76	73	74	84	95	62	5:18	498 / 481	37
# FISHER & PAYKEL Tasman E331T (A)	76	71	68	91	90	78	4:13	407 / 388	36
SAMSUNG Cool N' Cool SRL316NW (B)	74	71	71	85	71	70	4:58	465 / 447	37
WESTINGHOUSE RJ362V	71	70	64	82	84	67	5:02	439 / 493	38
# WHIRLPOOL 6WMV35NW	65	63	63	92	43	45	6:33	389 / 387	38
ELECTROLUX KELVINATOR N300J	61	70	40	81	77	69	5:09	424 / 464	44
376-450 L									
WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso RJ425V (C)	80	76	81	82	84	80	3:44	468 / 523	37
FISHER & PAYKEL Elegance E440T (A)	78	76	73	92	73	82	3:33	476 / 437	36
WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso RJ395V (D)	78	73	80	79	82	75	4:14	466 / 530	37
FISHER & PAYKEL Tasman E442B (A)	76	76	72	84	92	68	4:40	583 / 527	36
WESTINGHOUSE RJ422V	75	73	71	86	80	69	4:39	455 / 477	39
WESTINGHOUSE RJ442V	73	73	66	85	83	69	4:37	486 / 503	41
WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso RJ435V (E)	72	73	71	77	78	63	5:03	543 / 584	41
# LG Icebeam GR-S552GTA (F)	71	62	71	86	69	66	4:50	463 / 493	36
ELECTROLUX KELVINATOR NB380J	69	67	68	76	76	60	5:26	516 / 559	41
# WHIRLPOOL 6WMV43NW (G)	61	66	51	91	35	54	5:39	472 / 434	39
451-525 L									
FISHER & PAYKEL Elegance E521T (A)	82	76	80	91	92	78	3:46	508 / 483	36
WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso RJ525V (H)	80	79	82	81	80	77	3:52	507 / 590	37
ELECTROLUX KELVINATOR NB510J (J)	75	67	77	80	87	62	4:58	589 / 602	39
FISHER & PAYKEL Elegance E522B (A)	75	76	73	82	92	59	5:07	596 / 597	37
WESTINGHOUSE RJ522V	73	76	66	83	80	69	4:28	508 / 569	40
# SAMSUNG SR5502NXXA (K)	69	69	61	89	53	76	3:56	515 / 503	35
MORE THAN 525 L									
SAMSUNG Cool Tech Plus SRL550DW (L)	73	72	64	88	74	79	3:39	604 / 576	40
# LG GR-B218WV (M)	66	64	57	81	83	59	4:59	678 / 677	35
GE Profile PTU527X (N)	63	62	66	60	60	61	4:49	904 / 843	37
SIDE-BY-SIDE									
# WESTINGHOUSE WSE6100WA (P)	77	73	76	79	76	81	3:26	687 / 705	41
WHIRLPOOL Gold 6GD22DCKXH (Q) (R)	76	70	76	81	89	66	4:31	790 / 811	41
# LG B197WVS	71	74	62	80	83	77	3:44	680 / 675	37
# NEC S8564S (F)	68	77	56	82	61	74	3:55	710 / 689	40
# SAMSUNG SR5595NTD (R)	65	75	45	81	82	79	3:34	682 / 670	37
# SAMSUNG SR5535NW	64	74	45	83	66	78	3:46	602 / 605	36

* Newly tested models.

Measured dimensions include hinges and any protrusions at the back, such as the compressor. They're rounded up to the next centimetre.

** Prices are recommended retail, provided by manufacturers in August/September 2005.

na Not applicable.

(A) The manufacturer told us these models have had cosmetic changes since we've tested — a glass shelf in the freezer and a crisper drawer on rails rather than sitting on the fridge floor — but they're unlikely to greatly affect performance scores. Most Fisher & Paykel fridges come in four price

and style ranges: Tasman, Elegance (which have minor cosmetic differences between them), Inox (brushed stainless steel) and Iridium (fingerprint-resistant stainless steel).

(B) Available with platinum finish, SRL316NP, for \$999.

(C) Available in stainless steel, RJ423, \$1669.

(D) Available in stainless steel, RJ393, \$1459.

(E) Available in stainless steel, BJ433V, \$2089.

(F) Discontinued, but may be in some stores.

(G) Available in stainless steel, 6WMV43NS, \$1799.

(H) Available in stainless steel, RJ523V, \$2249.

(I) Available in stainless steel, NB510S, \$2169.

(K) Available with platinum finish, SR5503NTS, \$1599.

(L) Available with pewter finish, SRL551DP, \$2199.

(M) 'French door' model — see page 38.

(N) Only available with a stainless steel finish.

(P) Also available in stainless steel, WSE6100SA (\$2329); and with an ice and water dispenser in white, WSE6070WA (\$2639) and stainless steel WSE6070SA (\$3069). Energy use will be slightly higher for models with ice and water dispensers.

(Q) Has an ice and water dispenser.

(R) Available with pewter finish, SR5595DNP, \$2799.

(S) With temperature control.

(T) With a kit.

(U) Two years for labour and parts on the sealed system; the additional three years for parts only.

1 Overall score

The overall score is based on performance and ease of use, weighted as follows:

- Ease of use: 20%
- Temperature performance: 40%
- Energy efficiency: 20%
- Crisper freshness: 8%
- Cooling: 12%

Notes 2-6

Go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on any of the articles under 'Fridges' in the index to see what we tested and measured for these scores (under Our test).

FEATURES			SPECIFICATIONS										COSTS	
Model	Crisper drawers	Dairy	Freezer location	9 Door hinge position	Remove shelves with door at 90°	Measured dimensions (cm, H x W x D)**	10 Claimed total volume (L)	10 Claimed volume, fresh food (L)	10 Claimed volume, freezer (L)	Warranty (years)	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	11 10-year running costs (\$)	Price (\$)**
	2	✓	Bottom	R or L		161 x 64 x 70	373	250	123	2	NZ	Fisher & Paykel	722	1449
	1	✓	Top	Rev	✓	143 x 64 x 69	329	232	97	2	NZ	Fisher & Paykel	582	1019
	1		Bottom	R		178 x 60 x 66	316	199	117	2	China	Samsung	671	899
	1	✓	Top	R or L		164 x 70 x 65	364	273	91	2	Australia	Electrolux	740	1099
	1		Top	Rev	✓	167 x 60 x 77	350	270	80	2	Brazil	Whirlpool	581	1099
	1	✓	Top	R or L		162 x 61 x 65	303	228	75	2	Australia	Electrolux	696	899
	1	✓	Top	R or L		164 x 70 x 71	416	313	103	2	Australia	Electrolux	785	1409
	1	✓	Top	R or L		161 x 69 x 70	447	342	105	2	Australia	Fisher & Paykel	656	1549
	1	✓	Top	R or L		172 x 70 x 65	393	302	91	2	Australia	Electrolux	795	1309
	2	✓	Bottom	Rev (T)		170 x 67 x 71	442	307	135	2	Australia	Fisher & Paykel	791	1609
	1	✓	Top	R or L		164 x 70 x 71	416	313	103	2	Australia	Electrolux	716	1249
	1	✓	Top	R or L		172 x 70 x 71	442	339	103	2	Australia	Electrolux	755	1459
	1	✓	Bottom	R or L		172 x 71 x 71	431	300	131	2	Australia	Electrolux	876	1669
	2		Top	R		178 x 76 x 68	435	318	117	2	Korea	LG	740	1499
	1	✓	Bottom	R or L		172 x 71 x 65	381	267	114	2	Australia	Electrolux	839	1269
	1		Top	Rev	✓	175 x 71 x 77	430	325	105	2	Brazil	Whirlpool	651	1499
	2	✓	Top	R or L		170 x 80 x 71	517	400	117	2	Australia	Fisher & Paykel	725	1799
	2	✓	Top	R or L		172 x 80 x 71	517	396	121	2	Australia	Electrolux	885	1929
	2	✓	Bottom	R or L		172 x 81 x 71	505	349	156	2	Australia	Electrolux	903	1799
	2	✓	Bottom	R or L		170 x 80 x 71	519	360	159	2	Australia	Fisher & Paykel	896	1849
	2	✓	Top	R or L		172 x 80 x 71	517	396	121	2	Australia	Electrolux	854	1779
	1		Top	R	✓	175 x 78 x 73	502	349	153	5 (U)	Korea	Samsung	755	1399
	1		Bottom	R		180 x 83 x 73	551	361	190	2	Korea	Samsung	864	1999
	(S) 2	✓	Bottom	(M)		177 x 91 x 71	622	423	199	2	Korea	LG	1016	2599
	1		Top	R		171 x 76 x 73	527	368	160	2	Taiwan	Kleenmaid	1265	2499
	2	✓	LH side	na		176 x 90 x 71	606	357	249	2	Australia	Electrolux	1058	2009
	(S) 1	✓	LH side	na		170 x 84 x 83	644	419	225	2	USA	Whirlpool	1217	3799
	(S) 1	✓	LH side	na		176 x 90 x 68	581	353	228	2	Korea	LG	1013	1899
	2	✓	LH side	na		181 x 93 x 73	645	387	258	2	Korea	NEC	1034	1999
	2	✓	LH side	na		176 x 91 x 68	596	368	228	5 (U)	Korea	Samsung	1005	2099
2	✓	LH side	na		173 x 86 x 67	535	316	219	5 (U)	Korea	Samsung	908	1899	

7 Claimed / measured energy use

The claimed amount of electricity used over one year of normal operation, vs that calculated from our measurements. Most measurements are quite close to the claims, although five WESTINGHOUSE models tested last year were more than 10% higher.

8 Noise level

We measured the noise level of each fridge from 1 m distance during normal running; more noise is produced when the compressor starts up and also during the defrost cycle. The design of your kitchen and the fridge's

location also make a difference to what you'll hear, and you may notice that modern frost-free fridges make more unexpected noises (pops and clicks, gurgling, hissing and cracking sounds that can be quite loud) than older models did.

9 Door hinge position

R = on the right; L = on the left; Rev = reversible. A door that's reversible can be good if you move house and/or need to position the fridge differently. While you can do this yourself with some models, manufacturers often recommend getting a service call.

10 Claimed volume

The volume claimed by the manufacturer tells you approximately how much air space the fridge has to cool; less space is available for storage, especially in a frost-free freezer compartment. Use the volume to get an idea of how big the freezer is compared with the fresh-food compartment, so you can choose a fridge that meets your storage needs.

11 10-year running costs

These are calculated at a rate of 15 cents per kWh. A 10-year period provides a useful indication of the long-term differences between high and

low energy usage — and you should be able to expect your fridge to last at least that long.

WANT MORE HELP?

For a limited time you have access to our interactive 'compare-a-fridge' tool to help you choose the model that suits you best. You'll find it on www.choiceextra.com.au under 'Fridges' in the index.



You can get a good petrol mower
for less than \$400.

Cutting costs

IN A NUTSHELL

- Most of the models on test cut grass very well, but not all are easy to use.
- Our test revealed two good models for under \$400, but other models at this price point weren't as satisfactory.

What to buy

Models are profiled in rank order.

VICTA BRONCO BRA484A

Price: \$569

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent at cutting grass.
- Excellent controls.
- Best ease of use.

BAD POINTS

- The throttle cable gets in the way when you're removing the fuel cap.

HONDA BUFFALO BUCK HRU 19R

Price: \$699

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent at cutting grass,
- The largest catcher capacity.

BAD POINTS

- It takes some effort to move the cutting height lever.

ROVER PREMIER 35192

Price: \$599

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent at cutting grass.
- Adjustable handle height.

BAD POINTS

- Nothing to speak of.



On test: 11 four-stroke petrol-powered catcher lawnmowers, mainly chosen from the cheapest available models in each brand. Where a brand has a large range of models, we added a second, higher-priced model. The resulting lawnmowers ranged in price from \$299 to \$699.

None of the mowers had any problems cutting short grass. Some differences began to appear on medium and long grass, but most still cut well. The ease of use scores brought out the biggest differences — some models were let down by poor manoeuvrability, excessive vibration, poor controls or difficulty in adjusting the cutting height.

All but one of the mowers not only cut grass well, but left the lawn looking reasonably neat. The exception was the **TALON**, which consistently left a small trail of clippings behind it as well as not cutting as well as the others in medium and long grass — it scored lower for cutting performance. It's also heavy and comparatively hard to manoeuvre.

DIFFERENT STROKES

Nearly all current petrol mowers are four-stroke. They're popular for two main reasons: they use standard unleaded petrol and they're much less polluting than two-strokes. A four-stroke motor typically emits half the carbon monoxide and one-tenth the hydrocarbons that a two-stroke produces. Four-strokes have an oil sump that should be checked and the oil changed regularly, just like the oil in a car engine.

Two-strokes emit more pollution because they burn a mixture of petrol and oil rather than straight petrol. Some people still prefer them because their motors are simpler and very reliable. Also, because they don't have an oil sump as four-strokes do, two-strokes tend to be better suited to mowing steep slopes. On a steep angle, the oil in a four-stroke's sump can drain to one end and stop lubricating the engine — very bad for its moving parts. However, manufacturers advised us that four-strokes can generally cope with slopes of at least 15°.

WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

Except for the **TALON TOUGH TOOLS Eagle Cut & Catch**, the rest of the mowers cut grass very well, so for performance you'd probably be happy with any of them. However, they weren't as easy to use as the top models.

■ The control cable on the **MASPORT Maxicatch** flexed too much to turn the motor off using the switch. It had to be turned off manually by pushing on the lever at motor level.

■ The **YARD-MAN** is one of the worst for vibration. It's difficult to adjust its mowing height and our testers found the start toggle awkward to use. Its throttle cable gets slightly in the way when removing the fuel cap.

■ The **ROVER Easy Start** is also one of the worst for vibration and its throttle cable gets in the way when you remove the fuel cap.

■ The **MORRISON Vinaro** has problems with its catcher: clippings blow out between the catcher and the mower body and at one point the catcher flap fell off. Its cutting height is hard to adjust, and it's also one of the worst for vibration.

■ The **SUPASWIFT Lawn Leader** has the lowest ease of use score. Its catcher is smaller than the others, the controls are stiff and hard to use and the starter cord is mounted fairly high on the handle, requiring good shoulder strength to use. It tends to jump out of its lowest cutting height setting while in use and is one of the worst for vibration.

■ The **TALON** is the heaviest model on test and is tiring to use for long periods. Its starter cord also takes more effort to pull. It's the poorest at cutting grass, consistently leaving a trail of clippings behind it, and doesn't cut as close to vertical edges as the others, particularly at the front, meaning you'd have to trim the edges along walls after mowing. And its lowest height setting isn't as low as on most other models. It's the cheapest mower on test at \$299, but for a little more money there are much better models, like the **VICTA Lawnkeeper** for \$344.

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PROFILES: GENE ROSS

Brand / model (in rank order)

Brand / model (in rank order)	PERFORMANCE				SPECIFICATIONS				
	1 Overall score (%)	2 Cutting score (%)	3 Ease of use score (%)	4 Noise at 7.5 m / user position (dB)	5 Cutting positions	5 Cutting height range (mm)	Width of cut (mm)	Weight (kg)	Warranty (years)
VICTA Bronco BRA484A	84	90	74	71 / 85	10	15-70	480	24.9	2
HONDA Buffalo Buck HRU 19R	82	90	69	74 / 87	11	15-80	475	27.5	(D)
ROVER Premier 35192	82	90	71	74 / 90	12	10-55	450	27.3	(E)
MASPORT Lawnmarshal 983889	81	88	70	73 / 86	9	15-75	460	22.6	(F)
VICTA Lawnkeeper LK5464A	81	88	71	73 / 87	11	10-70	455	23.1	1
MASPORT Maxicatch 450 983915	80	90	66	73 / 86	10	10-70	460	24.7	(G)
YARD-MAN 408A	80	92	61	76 / 89	9	10-65	455	26.2	2
ROVER Easy Start 30026 (A)	79	86	69	74 / 88	9	10-55	455	23.4	(E)
MORRISON Vinaro 380 ST (B)	77	88	60	74 / 86	9	10-75	460	22.0	(H)
SUPASWIFT Lawn Leader 767JB	74	86	57	76 / 89	12	10-65	455	23.6	(J)
TALON TOUGH TOOLS Eagle Cut & Catch AM3050	66	66	66	71 / 84	12	35-85 (C)	480	30.6	2 (K)

PETROL, ELECTRIC OR MANUAL?

The average lawnmower doesn't use a lot of fuel, but with the price of petrol soaring ever higher, you might be considering an electric mower instead. They compare well with petrol mowers in many ways: they're generally lighter, quieter, much less polluting and often cheaper. On the downside, some models aren't as powerful, so may not be as suitable if you let your grass grow long. They're also limited by battery life or their extension cord, and many have a smaller width of cut than petrol mowers, so they're best suited to small or medium-sized lawns.

CHOICE tested electric mowers (mains-powered and battery) in November 2004 and found most of them very capable of mowing typical suburban lawns. We recommended several models; all those still available are listed below with their recommended retail prices.

- VIKING Linea.E ME410, \$399.
- TANDEM Prima 1400, \$349.
- ENVIROMOWER ECO500, \$599 (battery-powered).
- FLYMO RE370, \$299.
- HONDA HRE370, \$359.
- OLEO-MAC Serie K K40P, \$330.

- MASPORT Phoenix Cordless, \$449 (battery-powered).

Or, if you don't mind the exercise, there's always the old-style push mower, especially worth considering if you only have a small lawn. They're also the most environmentally friendly of mowers: they use no fuel, create no pollution, are very quiet and their scissor-like cutting action (as opposed to the tearing action of motor mowers) not only gives a neater look but is better for the grass.

What to look for

- Four-stroke or two-stroke? See *Different strokes*, page 43, for more.
- The engine control lever should be on the handlebar for easy access, and should be easy to operate.
- Check the starter cord is easy to pull. It's generally easier to operate when the cord is located on the engine, but a handle-mounted cord can be handy if you can't easily bend over; just make sure it's not mounted too high, as this can require a lot of shoulder strength to pull. The SUPASWIFT's starter cord is mounted quite high on the handle and our testers didn't

find it as easy to pull as the others.

- Look for a large number of cutting positions spread over a useful range of cutting heights. The TALON we tested doesn't have as useful a range of heights as the other models.
- Make sure the cutting height is easily adjustable, using one lever that acts on all four wheels. The MORRISON, SUPASWIFT and YARD-MAN are the hardest to adjust.
- A rigid plastic catcher is better than a bag, which is more likely to let dust and clippings escape. It should have two handles: one on top for carrying, and one on the back for easy emptying. Look for a catcher with a good

capacity so you're not forever having to empty it; all the mowers on test have a good-sized rigid plastic catcher, though the SUPASWIFT's is a little smaller than the others.

- The mower should be easy to push and manoeuvre across all the conditions you'll use it in. Big wheels improve handling on rough ground, and light weight generally makes the mower easier to push and turn. All the tested models handled well, except the TALON: it's heavy and hard to manoeuvre, particularly around corners.
- If you can, try starting the mower to check whether it's too noisy or vibrates more than

Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Price (\$)**
Australia	Victa Lawncare	569
Australia	Honda Motorcycle & Power Equipment	699
Australia	Rover Mowers	599
New Zealand	Masport	389
Australia	Victa Lawncare	344
New Zealand	Masport	589
New Zealand	MTD Products	575
Australia	Rover Mowers	398
New Zealand	Masport	358
Australia	Allpower Industries	539 (L)
China	Talon Tools	299

* Mower only; doesn't include catcher.

** Recommended or average retail, as supplied by manufacturers in September 2005, unless noted otherwise.

- (A) Will be replaced in November by model 30028 with a new engine.
- (B) Replaced by a new version with the same model number, made in China and with a 'quickcut' blade.
- (C) The manufacturer says there's a new version of this model with a range of 16–66 cm.
- (D) Two years for engine, one year for all other parts.
- (E) Two years for engine, one year for all other parts.
- (F) One year for engine, four years for chassis, 'lifetime' for catcher, two years for all other parts.
- (G) Two years for engine, six years for chassis, 'lifetime' for catcher, two years for all other parts.
- (H) One year for engine, two years for all other parts.
- (I) Two years for engine, not stated for other parts.
- (K) Service recommended after first five hours. Warranty voided if not serviced after 12 months/50 hours. Of course statutory warranties still apply.
- (L) The price we paid in July 2005.

The handle should be comfortable to hold and preferably height-adjustable (as on the two tested Rovers). A turned-up handle is easier on your wrists and gives better control over the mower. All the tested mowers except the Rover Easy Start and the Supaswift have one.



GENE POSS

is comfortable. All the mowers tested have noticeable vibration — the MASPORT Lawnmarshall, MORRISON, ROVER Easy Start, SUPASWIFT and YARD-MAN are the worst, while the VICTA Lawnkeeper and the TALON rated best in this respect. All the models have similar noise levels.

■ A wash port or nozzle on top of the housing makes it easy to clean underneath the mower, including the blades.

■ Is the mower easy to maintain: can you easily change the oil, air filter and spark plugs?

1 Overall score

The overall score is a combination of cutting performance and ease of use scores, weighted as follows:

- Cutting: 60%
- Ease of use: 40%

2 Cutting score

This is based on the following equally weighted assessments:

- Cutting short grass.
- Appearance of short grass after mowing.
- Cutting medium-length grass.
- Appearance of medium grass after mowing.
- Cutting long grass.

The appearance of long grass after mowing wasn't assessed, as it's done without the catcher fitted and all mowers tend to leave a messy finish.

3 Ease of use score

Ease of use is based on the following equally weighted assessments:

- Vibration.
- Pushing/manoeuvring.
- Handle comfort.
- Controls.

- Cutting height adjustment.
- Starting.
- Catcher.

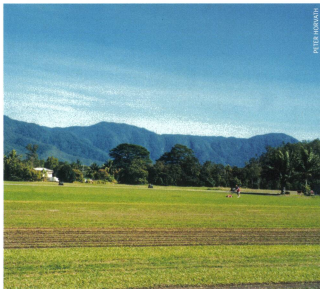
4 Noise

We measured the noise from the user's position and at 7.5 m from the mower. They're all loud.

5 Cutting positions/cutting height range

The length the grass is cut to can be varied by adjusting the height of the blade above the ground. These columns show the number of positions available and the range of approximate lengths of grass you can cut to.

The cutting heights shown aren't the exact length of grass you'll get, as we measured the distance between the blade and the bottom of the wheels, but it does give a sense of the differences between each model. A mower with a comparatively low maximum cutting height will probably have more trouble cutting a very overgrown lawn.



PETER KIRKMAN

THANKS FOR THE GRASS

We test mowers in August in order to have our report ready for spring. That means heading to Cairns, where winters are mild and the grass grows fast all year round. Our thanks go to Tropical Lawns at Gordonvale for making their turf farm available for our test.

Food Safety Week

Food Safety Week is being held from 7–12 November, and this year it's all about looking after food while you're on the move, be it camping, caravanning or bushwalking.

Maintaining the right temperature is one of the main keys to safe food storage, and it's quite a challenge to do this when transporting food. To keep it safe, food must be kept at temperatures above 65°C or below 4°C. The temperature zone in between provides a good environment for the growth of micro-organisms that could cause food poisoning.

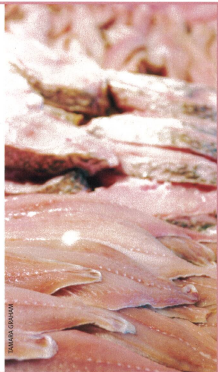
A portable car fridge could be a worthwhile investment if you're often on the road for more than a few hours, although in a CHOICE test published in December 2003 we found that some models didn't maintain the necessary temperature. It's also important to consider the type of food you take with you. Unless you have access to reliable refrigeration, perishable food such as meat and dairy are best left behind on this sort of trip.

For more information and tips on keeping food safe while you're on the move, go to www.choice.com.au/food.

SOMETHING FISHY?

Invested your hard-earned in a nice fillet of barramundi lately, only to find it seemed more like perch? Now there's somewhere you can channel your anger, with the launch of a seafood hotline.

The Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation has established the hotline, which is designed to catch rogue retailers who are deliberately mislabelling fish so they can charge more for inferior species. The service reports the traders to the appropriate state and territory authorities that are ultimately responsible for enforcing labelling laws. The toll-free number is 1800 737 147.



Nutrition by numbers

Whether you're counting carbs or kilojoules or simply watching how much fat you eat, the chances are that when you're shopping you rely on the nutrition information that's now on most food labels. But how reliable are these seemingly precise figures?

In reality the information's unlikely to be spot on because of seasonal and batch variations that manufacturers can't avoid. Factors like where the food was grown, climatic variations and the time the food's spent in storage can all affect the levels of kilojoules, protein, fats, carbohydrates, etc., in the product that you buy. So manufacturers express the nutrition information as 'average values'.

Unfortunately there's no specific requirement in the Food Standards Code as to how accurate the information must be. But in the UK, for major nutrients such as fat, protein and carbohydrates, a margin of 20% either side of the value on the label is considered acceptable (for example, if the label says 10 g, the actual value can be between 8 g and 12 g). A margin of 30% is considered acceptable for minor nutrients making up between 2% and 5% of a food.

So how reliable are the figures on labels here? We bought 23 packaged foods that most people are likely to have in their fridge or cupboards and sent them to two independent labs for analysis. We then compared the results with the figures on the labels.

On the whole, the results were reassuring — about 75% of the 161 nutrients we tested were within 20% of the amount claimed on the label. Of the rest, most were relatively minor ingredients and some were outside the UK's accepted margin of 30% for them, but in such small amounts the differences wouldn't have much impact on your daily intake

NUTRITION INFORMATION	SERVES PER PACKAGE: 1	SERVING SIZE: 40g	
	AVE. QUANTITY	PER 40g SERVE	PER 100g
ENERGY		808.05kJ	2020.13kJ
PROTEIN		3.58g	8.94g
GLUTEN		0.00g	0.00g
FAT - TOTAL		12.17g	30.41g
- SATURATED		5.54g	13.84g
- MONOUNSATURATED		4.71g	11.78g
- POLYUNSATURATED		1.72g	4.31g
CARBOHYDRATE - TOTAL		17.92g	44.81g
- SUGAR		15.13g	37.83g
DIETARY FIBRE		3.16g	7.91g
SODIUM		15.72mg	39.31mg
POTASSIUM		81.09mg	202.72mg

GENE ROSS

More realistic rounding would make it clearer that the nutrient amounts listed are only averages, not exact. For example, giving figures to two decimal places, as above, implies a level of precision that's completely unrealistic.

of that particular nutrient. In the products tested at least, levels of sugars and sodium were more often than not lower than the label claimed.

So next time you're comparing food labels keep in mind that the figures are a reasonable approximation of nutrient amounts, but they're not exact.

And a final thought — it's best to use the 'per 100 g or 100 mL' column to compare similar products, rather than 'per serving'. There are often big differences between manufacturers' ideas about what constitutes a 'serving'.

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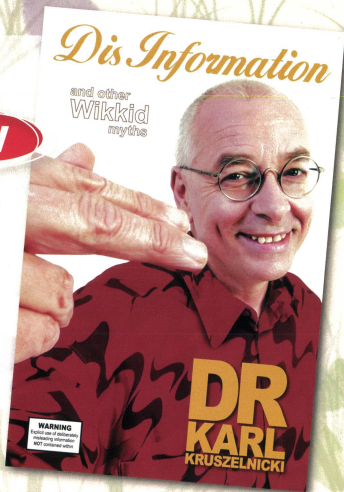
Some of the following are true and some are not:

- Cleopatra was insanely beautiful.
- Piranhas are the deadliest fish.
- A purring cat is a happy cat.
- Oranges are the richest source of vitamin C.

Find out whether these are true or false, and much more.

Dr Karl Kruszelnicki is the Julius Sumner Miller Fellow at the University of Sydney and a well-known radio and TV personality.

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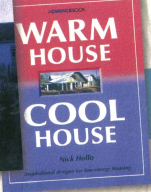
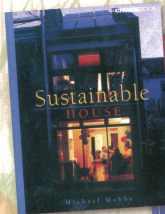
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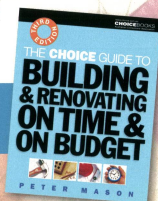
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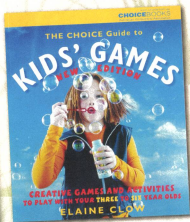
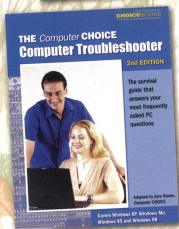
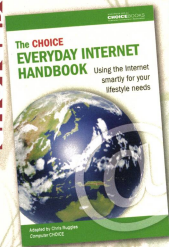
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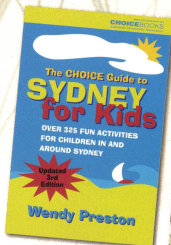
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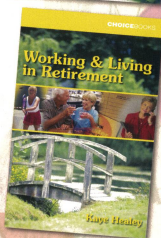
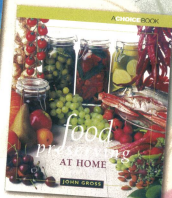
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recalls&bans

Nowadays there are so many product recalls we may not be able to print all of them in CHOICE. For comprehensive recall information go to the Product Recalls Australia website: www.recalls.gov.au. If you don't have web access, call the Product Safety Policy section of the ACCC on (02) 6243 1262.

Companies often rent 1800 numbers for a couple of months after a recall is announced. If the number given is no longer operating, phone the manufacturer or retailer direct.

BABY WALKER and ROCKER: Skippy Australia has recalled **Brand New Baby Walker with push bar**, and **Brand New Baby Walker and Rocker 2 in 1**.

The problem: They don't comply with the Australian standard. They have no automatic braking mechanism, no warning labels with the statements required by the standard, and may not meet the stability requirement.

What to do: Stop using them. For information on returning them to Skippy for a refund call (03) 9555 5132.

COT: Skippy Australia has recalled **Skippy cots**, product numbers TZC-507 and TZC-512.

The problem: They don't comply with the Australian standard.

What to do: Stop using them. For information on returning them to Skippy for a refund call (03) 9555 5132.

BABY BIBS: Coles supermarkets and Coles Online have recalled **Coles Baby 3 Pack Bibs**, product number 9300601234707, item code 4359359, sold in Coles stores nationally. Pick 'n' Pay in Queensland and Coles Online. The bibs affected have a Velcro opening and come in the colours blue, pink, green and white with coloured trim. They don't have any print or motif.

The problem: The bib label may detach from the garment and could cause serious harm to an infant's health.

What to do: Return it to your nearest Coles store for a refund, or for more information call 1800 061 562.

ICE BLOCK MOULDS: Home Living has recalled **Home Living Ice Block Moulds**, brightly coloured plastic moulds making four ice blocks, approximately 10.5 cm wide and 13 cm high, barcode number 9316203306623.

The problem: The lids and sticks may break off, posing a choking hazard for young children.

What to do: Stop using it and remove it from the reach of children. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call McPhersons Consumer Products on 1800 651 146.

BEAN BAG: Freedom Group has recalled the **Kidz Polar Fleece Bean**

Bag, sold in two designs: a pink bag with a flower motif and a blue bag with a star motif.

The problem: Not all the bags have been fitted with a child-resistant slide fastener as required by the safety standard.

What to do: Stop using it and remove it from the reach of children. Return it to your nearest Freedom store for a refund.

FOOD: Marco Polo Foods has recalled **Trata Anchovy Fillets in Sunflower Oil**, 50 g tin with ring-pull lid, best-before dates of 16 Sep 2006, 17 Sep 2006 and 22 Sep 2006, imported from Greece and sold in the AC, NSW, SA, Victoria and WA.

The problem: The product may have higher than acceptable levels of histamine. It may have a bitter taste and cause symptoms including headache, itching and an upset stomach.

What to do: Don't eat it. Consult your doctor if you have health concerns. Return the anchovies to the place of purchase for a refund, or call (02) 9718 8922 for more information.

FOOD: New World Trading Company has recalled **Asian Boy (La Bo De) Seasoning Soy Sauce**, 650 ml glass bottle, sold in Queensland, SA, Victoria and WA.

The problem: Tests have indicated the presence of chloropropanol in levels higher than acceptable according to the Food Standards Code.

What to do: Don't eat it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

HAIR COLOUR: Procter and Gamble has recalled **Wella Perfekte 2/0 Black Permanent Crème Colour**, all batch numbers.

The problem: The colourant in the tube has recrystallised, and if rubbed into hair may cause minor irritation or scratches to the hands or scalp. The irritation will be worse if the skin is broken.

What to do: Don't use it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call 1300 661 688.

AC adaptor: Dick Smith Electronics has recalled **Digitor AC adaptors**, sold through Dick Smith Electronics, Dick Smith Powerhouse and Tandy stores between 10 February 2005 and 15 May 2005. The affected models are marked with the following catalogue numbers near the bottom of the product nameplate: M9642, M9916, M9917, M9921, M9922, M9923 and M9925.

The problem: The plastic casings of some units may separate, exposing hazardous voltages and a risk of electric shock.

What to do: Stop using them. Return them to any Dick Smith Electronics, Dick Smith Powerhouse or Tandy store for a refund or replacement, or for more information call 1300 660 054.

MOBILE PHONE CHARGER: Unitech Products has recalled **mobile phone chargers** for ERI T28, model number STC5RoVo500, and for PANX60/X70, model number STC6RoVo500, sold in the last 18 months.

The problem: They don't comply with the Australian standard, and the cover may easily break away from the plug, exposing live 240 volts.

What to do: Stop using them. Call (02) 9584 9910 to arrange a replacement.

FIRE DETECTION PRODUCTS: GE

Infrastructure has recalled the following **Ziltron Fire Detection products:** AS2 and AS3 fire panels; ZP720-2, Z620-982-X3335, ZP710-2, ZP725-2, Z620-722-1 and Z620-982-1 detectors; X3200 and X3210 duct

probes; and EWIS evacuation system.

The problem: Deficiencies have been found in the above products that may result in a failure to detect all fire hazards in certain circumstances.

What to do: For information on whether modifications are required call (03) 9259 4700.

SMOKE ABSORBER: Cooper Tools has recalled **Nicholson Smoke Absorber**, catalogue number NSA-ESD.

The problem: The rear of the plastic case behind the on/off switch can become electrically live.

What to do: Stop using it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

TEALIGHT HOLDER: Freedom Furniture has recalled **Oasis tealight candle holder**, a brass-coloured cylindrical metal body with red or amber translucent panels, a six-sided roof and round metal base resting on three spherical metal feet. It's approximately 13 cm high with a round ring attached.

The problem: The translucent panels may melt or catch alight.

What to do: Stop using it. Return it to your nearest Freedom store for a refund.

BARBECUE: Coleman Brands has recalled **Coleman barbecues**, models 5100, 5300 and 5600.

The problem: The regulator assembly may leak gas and create a fire or explosion risk.

What to do: Stop using the barbecue. Only certain batches are affected and can be identified by a date code. If you have one of the above models, call 1800 330 086 to find out how to identify an affected regulator and arrange a replacement if required.

COMPUTER BATTERY: Further to a recall published in the July issue of CHOICE, **Apple** has extended a recall of **lithium ion rechargeable batteries**, sold from October 2004 to May 2005 for use with PowerBook G4 notebook computers, to include batteries sold with the 12-inch iBook G4 and 12-inch PowerBook G4 models, as well as the 15-inch PowerBook G4.

Computer model	Battery number range	Battery serial number range
12-inch iBook G4	A1061	HQ441-HQ507
12-inch PowerBook G4	A1079	3X446-3X510
15-inch PowerBook G4	A1078	3X446-3X509

The model and serial numbers are on the label on the bottom of the battery and can be read by removing the battery from the computer.

The problem: They could overheat and pose a fire hazard.

What to do: Stop using the battery. Contact Apple on 133 622 to arrange to have it exchanged.

aboutchoice

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index

HOW TO USE THIS INDEX

Bold type indicates a test, survey or trial report, normal type indicates other articles.

* Indicates an update of a previous report, additions or corrections to reports, small follow-up items, letters or recalls. For space reasons, the index generally doesn't include Choice Cuts and other small pieces.

Air conditioners, split-system inverters **Oct**
Airline survey, domestic **Jun, Sep***
Arthritis treatments **Aug**

Balsamic vinegar **Nov**
Barbecues, gas, trolley/portable **Dec**
Batteries, rechargeable, AA **Mar**
Bicycle helmets for children **Nov**
Biscuits, shortbread **Jul**
Blood pressure monitors **May**
Body fat scales **Oct**
Bottled water **Jul, Nov***
Bra fitting services **Jul**
Breakfast cereals **Mar**
Butter and spreads **Jan/Feb**

Camcorders, digital **Jan/Feb**
Cameras **Apr, Jun*, Oct**
digital printer docks **Jun**

Cars
ANCAP crash tests **Jul**
crash repair costs **Jun**
hybrid petrol/electric cars **Apr**
reader reviews **Mar, Apr**
rear vision safety **Sep**
used car safety **Dec, Nov**
waterless car cleaners **Mar**
Cashew nuts **Dec**
Cereals, breakfast **Mar**
Champagne and sparkling wine **Dec**
Child/baby concerns

bicycle helmets **Nov**
cot, Stokke **Jun, Jul***
cots **Jan/Feb**
dishwater detergent danger **Jul**
high chairs **Oct**
lunches and snacks **Jan/Feb**
strollers, jogger **Jun, Aug***

Cleaners
car, waterless **Mar**
laundry detergents **May, Jul***
mitts **Apr**
steam **Apr**
Clothes dryers **Apr, Jun***
Cockroach killers **Dec**

Coffee
chains (coffee and cakes) **May**
espresso machines, auto **Aug**
Convection heaters **Aug**
Cooxkops, gas **Jun**
Cordless drills, cheap **Apr**
Cordless phones **Apr**
Cots
Stokke **Jun, Jul***
test **Jan/Feb**
Crackers and crispbread **Nov**

Detergents, laundry **May, Jul***
Detox kits **Oct**
Digital camcorders **Jan/Feb**
Digital cameras **Apr, Jun*, Oct**
Dishwasher detergent danger **Jul**

Dishwashers **Jan/Feb, Jul**
Doors, security screen **Mar**
Drills, cheap cordless **Apr**
Drugs, new vs old **Sep**
Dryers, clothes **Apr, Jun***
Duty-free shopping **Aug**
DVD recorders **Aug, Nov***
DVD rentals, online **Oct**

EBay **Sep**
Electricity, costs and supply **Mar**
Energy drinks **Sep**
Espresso machines, auto **Aug**
Exercise equipment, home **Sep**

Flooring guide, timber **Dec**
Food

balsamic vinegar **Nov**
biscuits, shortbread **Jul**
breakfast cereals **Jan/Feb**
butter and spreads **Jan/Feb**
children's lunches and snacks **Jan/Feb**
coffee shop chains **May**
crackers and crispbread **Nov**
energy drinks **Sep**
honey **May**
juice bars **Dec**
labelling, marketing **Jul**
low-carb varieties **Aug**
nuts, cashews and mixed **Dec**
spaghetti **Dec**
spreads and butter **Jan/Feb**
storage, disposable **Jan/Feb**
sugar **Sep**
trans fat **Apr**
water, bottled **Jul, Nov***

Fridges
mixed sizes **May, Jun*, Nov**
side-by-sides **Nov**
Funerals **Oct**

Gas cooktops **Aug**
Glamour photography **Apr**
Glucosamine **Aug**

Hair straighteners **Aug**
Health

arthritis treatments **Aug**
blood pressure monitors **May**
detox kits **Oct**
drugs, new vs old **Sep**
glucosamine **Aug**
multivitamins **Jun, Sep***
sleep aids **Sep**
St John's wort **May**
sun safety **Nov**

Heaters
convection, electric **Jun**
outdoor, gas **Mar, Jun***
High chairs **Oct**
Home exercise equipment **Sep**
Home theatre systems **Dec**
Honey **May**
Hybrid (petrol/electric) cars **Apr**

Index, four-year **Jun**
Indoor paint **Dec**
Insurance, travel **Dec**
Jogger strollers **Jun, Aug***
Juice bars **Dec**
Juicers **Oct**

Labelling, food **Jul**
Ladders **Aug**
Laundry detergents **May, Jul***
Lawnmowers, petrol **Nov**
LCD vs plasma TVs **Nov**
Low-carb foods **Aug**

Microwave ovens **Jul, Nov***
Mitts, cleaning **Apr**
Mixed nuts **Dec**
Mobile phones
CDMA **Nov**
GSM **Jan/Feb, Jun, Aug***
Moisturisers with sunscreen **Sep**
Multifunction printers **May**
Multivitamins **Jun, Sep***

Nuts, cashews and mixed **Dec**

Online DVD rentals **Oct**
Osteoarthritis treatments **Aug**
Outdoor gas heaters **Mar**
Ovens, buying guide **Jul**
Ovens, microwave **Jul, Nov***

Paint, indoor **Dec**
Pay TV **Mar**
Pest managers, finding a good one **Oct**
Pet care services **Aug**
Phones
cordless **Apr**
mobile — see Mobile phones
smart **Nov**
VoIP calls **Apr**
Photography, glamour **Apr**
Plasma vs LCD TVs **Nov**
Printer docks for digital cameras **Jun**
Printers
inkjet and laser, colour **Sep**
multifunction **May**

Rangehoods **Jun**
Rechargeable batteries, AA **Mar**
Refrigerators — see Fridges
Rice cookers **Mar**

Scales, body fat **Oct**
Security screen doors **Mar**
Shortbread biscuits **Jul**
Sleep aids **Sep**
Smartphones **Nov**
Snacks for children **Jan/Feb**
Solariums **Nov**
Spaghetti **Jun**
Sparkling wine and champagne **Dec**
Spreads and butter **Jan/Feb**

St John's wort **May**
Steam cleaners **Apr**
Storage, food, disposable **Jan/Feb**
Strollers, jogger **Jun, Aug***
Sugar **Sep**
Sun safety **Nov**

Tanning salons **Nov**
Telephones — see Phones
Television
51 cm **May**
LCD vs plasma TVs **Nov**
pay TV **Mar**
Termite inspections **Oct**
Timber flooring guide **Dec**
Toothpaste, whitening **Jan/Feb**
Trans fat **Apr**
Travel insurance **Dec**

Vacuum cleaners **Jul, Sep***
Video equipment
DVD recorders **Aug, Nov***
home theatre systems **Dec**
Vinegar, balsamic **Nov**
VoIP phone calls **Apr**

Washer-dryers **Mar, Apr***
Washing machines **Sep**
Washing powder **May**
Water, bottled **Jul, Nov***
Waterless car cleaners **Mar**
Whitening toothpaste **Jan/Feb**
Wine, sparkling and champagne **Dec**

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HOW ABOUT A LITTLE HELP?

The prize for the best entry goes to A Horsfall. Thanks also to K Stavref, Y Ward, H Anderson, J Jenkins and W Riley for their contributions to this month's *Hard Word*. Please keep them coming.

If you have any examples you think deserve to be on this page, send them to *The Hard Word*, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204. Please don't email us your entries — we need the originals.